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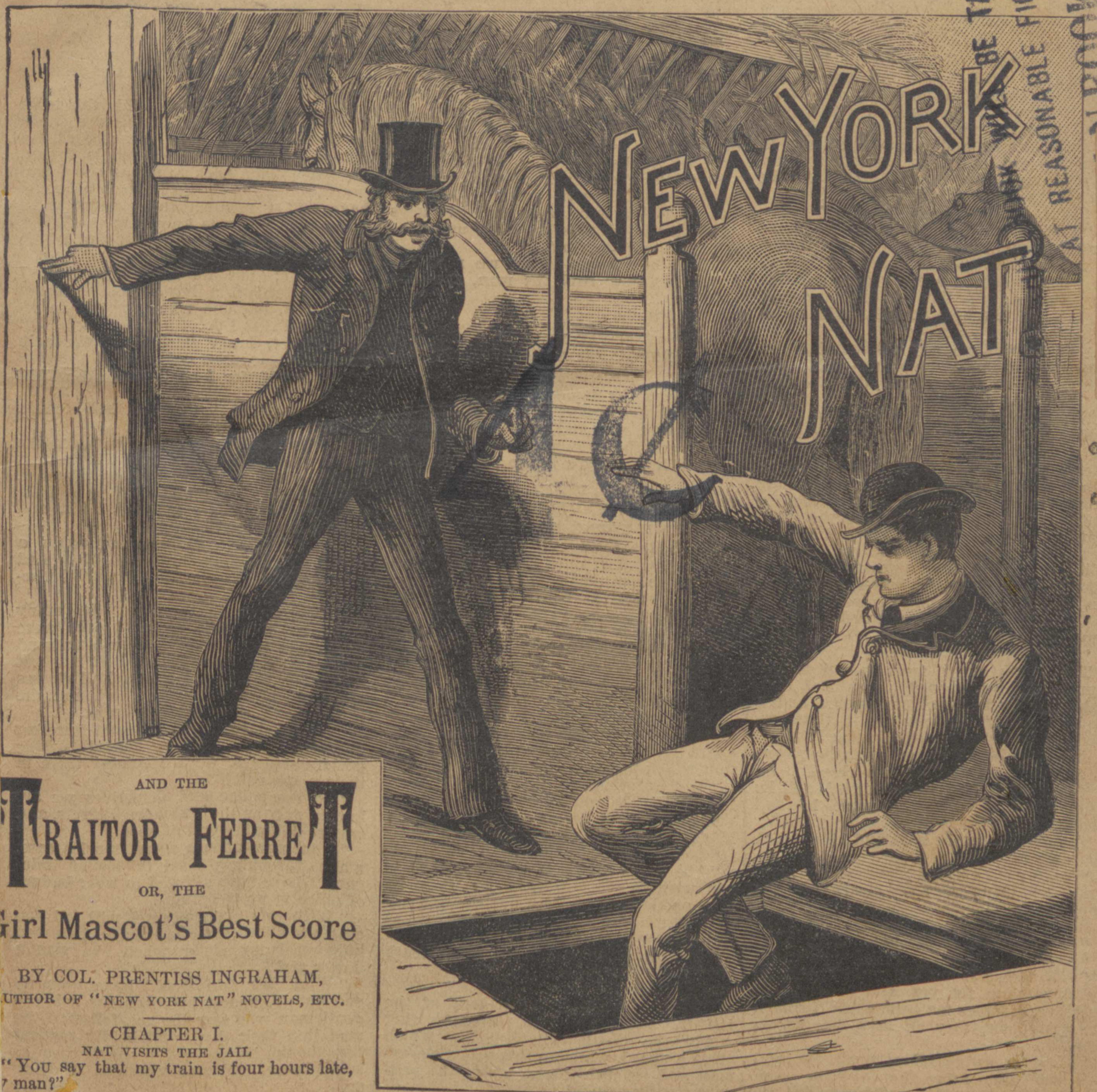
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NEW
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XXVI.



AND THE
TRAITOR FERRETT
OR, THE
Girl Mascot's Best Score

BY COL. PRENTISS INGRAHAM,
AUTHOR OF "NEW YORK NAT" NOVELS, ETC.

CHAPTER I.

NAT VISITS THE JAIL
"You say that my train is four hours late,
man?"
"Yis, sur; maybe more."

DOWN INTO A DARK TRAP WENT NEW YORK NAT.

The Girl Mascot's Best

"And I am to spend four long hours in this little town?"

"Yes, sur."

"What shall I do to pass the time?"

"Do what every one else is going to do, sur."

"What is that?"

"Go to the hanging, sur."

"To what hanging?"

"Sure, sur, an' Trent Trevor is to be hung."

"For what crime?"

"Murther in the first degree, it is."

"Trent Trevor? It seems that I have heard the name before—I must look it up in my book of crimes," and the one who uttered the words spoke rather to himself than to the baggage smasher at the little junction a mile from the town of R—, where he had dropped off to take a westbound train.

"Will you be afther radin' to me out of the same book o' crimes, young man, fer I haven't a thing to do fer four hours, though I daren't lave the joonction."

The youth smiled, for he was only a youth, tall, handsome, well dressed, and with clean-cut, daring and determined features.

"Under other circumstances I might be glad to read to you, my friend, but you have excited my interest in this poor fellow who is to be hanged, and I shall walk over into the town. Here is some change for you, and I have a 'Herald' in my grip you can look over. Keep my satchel until my return. Now, tell me what you know of the hanging."

"Will, sur, I will and thankee."

"You see, sur, Trent Trevor is his name, and he was a high-flyer of the town some years ago, and spent his money free, but one day a detective came out from the big city to arrest him for the murder of a rich pawnbroker, and the robbery of him, too."

"There was no use a lyin' about it, for circumstantial evidence told their story, and he were put in jail to be took to the city for trial."

"But, Lord love you, young man! He got out o' jail that night, though to do so he had ter kill ther keeper, and nothing more was heard of him for years, when he was found running a gambling saloon in the Far West. Then they arrested and brought him back here for trial for the murther of the jail keeper, for it had been proved that he had not kilt the pawnbroker, nor robbed him, though who did he murder they don't know, but he does, and he won't tell."

"And he is to be hanged to-day for the murder of the keeper?"

"Yis, sur."

The youth drew from his pocket a bunch of keys, opened his satchel, and taking a book therefrom, which had a padlock and fastening upon it, thus preventing its being opened, he fitted to this a key, and began to run over the pages, the Irishman watching him closely.

"Trenchard Trevor—here it is," and he read what followed the name he had found.

Then relocking the book and his satchel, he said:

"Take good care of my grip, my man, and I will bring you some cigars from the town."

"Yis, sur."

"Is you going to the hanging?"

"Yes."

"It's afther being the most entertainin' devarshun for yez, and bad luck to meself that kapes me from going, for he'll die game, sur, they all says that knows him."

"He's ter swing off at noon, sir, and it's some time afore that now, so eoom back arly, sur, and be afther tellin' me all about ther hangin', av yer plaze."

The young fellow smiled at the earnestness of the Celt, and walked rapidly away toward the town, visible in the distance, while a church bell tolling for a funeral must have sent thrills of anguish and despair through the heart of the doomed man as he sat in his cell listening to the dismal sound.

As he neared the town the youth saw that vehicles of all descriptions were hastening in from the country, their occupants seeming anxious to satisfy their morbid longing for a scene of horror.

The town seemed to be alive, as upon a holiday, and a sneer curled the lip of the youth as he muttered: "And all this to see an unfortunate man die a death of shame."

Duty demands my presence, or I would gladly turn the other way, for with all the scenes I am compelled to witness of sorrow, wrong and death, I am not yet heart-hardened, thank Heaven."

Continuing on into the town he reached the stone jail, and, rapping at the iron gate, a man's face appeared at a little slide and he said abruptly:

"No one admitted."

"Pardon me, but I am an exception."

"No exceptions—see!" was the rude response, and the slide was being closed when the youth threw open his coat and said, in imitation of the burly guardian of the gate:

"Look at that—see?"

The man's eyes fell upon a peculiar badge, studded with gems, a diamond eye, to which were suspended two keys crossed, and of massive gold, upon the latter some engraving.

"Be kind enough to let me read the engraving, sir," said the man, speaking politely:

"It says simply:

ADMIT BEARER
ANYWHERE, EVERYWHERE,
ON DEMAND.

"It bears the name of the Chief of the United States Secret Service Bureau."

"Walk in, sir; and pardon my abruptness," and the gate was thrown open to the youth wearing a badge so important.

CHAPTER II.

THE YOUNG DETECTIVE.

The badge shown by the young man was respected at once by the keeper, as well as the gateman of the jail, though he was looked at with surprise, as one remarkably young to wear such an insignia of the Secret Service.

Not wishing another rebuff, the youth opened his vest and revealed a New York City Detective badge, and several others, while he said politely:

"It is necessary that I have a private interview with your prisoner, sir, Trenchard Trevor, as I desire certain information which he alone can give."

"You are welcome to see him, friend, but it will do you no good, for neither preacher, sheriff nor any one else can get him to say a word—his lips are sealed."

"Is he alone?"

"The death watch is with him, and if you wish to see him alone you must be responsible that he does not commit suicide, for he is high spirited and would rather die any death than on the gallows."

"I do not wonder, for any other death were preferable."

"But I will be responsible, sir."

Through the dismal corridors of the jail the youth was led, into the ring where the death cell was, by which stood a guard, while outside was a clergyman and several others, whom the prisoner stoutly refused to see.

The keeper led the youth to the iron

grating, the guard put the key in the lock, and opened the door, and the visitor stepped within.

"A young gentleman to see you, Mr. Trevor," announced the keeper.

"I do not care to speak to any one, as I told you, Brandon!"

"This young man has credentials that admit him anywhere, so I could not refuse him, Mr. Trevor."

"Pardon my intrusion upon you, Mr. Trevor, but I do not come from either idle curiosity or wish to worry you, only to have a few words with you."

The youth spoke kindly, and Trenchard Trevor looked him squarely in the face, and replied:

"Sit down, please."

He was a striking looking young man, tall, slender, though athletic in build, intelligent and refined looking, having the polished manners of a man of the world.

He was dressed in deep black, his white shirt collar was open at the neck. He was perfectly calm in the face of his approaching fate, with but an hour and a half between him and an awful doom.

The keeper was surprised at the reception of the young detective, and, with the guard without, withdrew from the cell, leaving the visitor and the prisoner alone together.

"Mr. Trevor, I am delayed in this town several hours, while awaiting a train to my destination, and, hearing at the station you were doomed to die to-day, the name came back to me as one I had heard before. I looked it up in a book I have and I recalled the circumstances under which it was known to me."

The prisoner listened quietly and asked:

"Have we ever met before?"

"No, sir; but let me tell you that I am a detective, a boy ferret, as I am christened, but one who is acting in secret in all that I do."

"You see, I am placing confidence in you, sir."

"Why not, for I shall be dead within two hours?"

"It is not for that reason, but because I am interested in you."

"Circumstances threw me upon the world in early boyhood, and I became a sailor, while my sister, older than I, was left as a waif and was, as a little girl, a street singer in New York, and later a flower girl."

"Fate brought us together again a couple of years ago, and both of us had seen much of life in the slums and elsewhere."

"We knew that there were many young children good at heart who were drifting to ruin because no helping hand was extended to them, and so we got together a band of youths, of all classes and ages, of which I am chief, and she is known as their Mascot Queen."

"We are devoting our lives to ferreting out crime, and, though hunted by the police ourselves, we are helping them in their crook catching."

"To the police and detectives we are known only as the Unknown Ferrets, and we are doing a world of good."

"I am now upon a secret service case, while, through a good friend of influence, I have been allowed to wear badges of office to protect me."

"With this explanation I will tell you that one night, some years ago, two men kidnapped my sister when she was a flower girl."

"What her fate would have been no one knows, had it not been for a brave gentleman who saw the act, followed the men into their dive, and boldly rescued her, though he had to kill one of them in self-defense, and was wounded in doing so."

"Not wishing publicity, he told her not

to speak of the affair, and left her in safety at her humble home.

"But she begged for his name and he told her in confidence."

"The name was Trent Trevor, and he was a fashionable young man about town."

"I remember the circumstance. She was a beautiful girl of thirteen, and I was interested in her, and intended seeking her out and befriending her, but was overwhelmed with misfortunes just then myself."

"Yes, and let me tell you that she was passing Blenheim's pawn shop the night of the murder and robbery. It was a stormy night, and she saw a man let himself out of the door and he carried two large satchels.

"He had a confederate near, who was watching the policeman on that beat."

"She saw both men distinctly and neither man was you."

"Very true."

"A couple of days after she saw that you were arrested as the murderer of Pawnbroker Blenheim and the robber of his safe."

"She determined to come out here and see you, to offer her testimony, but when she arrived, the next day, you had escaped the night before, and it was said had killed the keeper in doing so."

"It is for that crime I am to hang, for I was proven guilty."

"Girl that she was, my sister investigated your escape all in her power, and to this day she vows that you are not guilty of the murder of the keeper any more than you were the slayer of Blenheim, the pawnbroker."

"God bless her sweet soul!"

"But, what is your name, and her's?" and the prisoner was deeply moved.

"Her name is Olive Chandler, sir."

"And yours?"

"The boy ferrets call me New York Nat."

CHAPTER III.

WITH SEALED LIPS.

The calm exterior of the doomed man was broken for a moment by what the young detective had said to him, and he replied:

"It was proven that I was not the murderer of Blenheim, or the robber, but who committed the crime could not be discovered."

"I had met with financial reverses just then, by aiding a friend; I was driven to my wits' end for money, and some enemy accused me of the crime, but I proved an alibi."

"Still, having been accused, I was supposed to know who the guilty one was, it even being said that he acted for me."

"As to my escape from this prison, I did escape, but how, or by what means, it matters not, for I am to die for the murder of the keeper, and so let it be."

"Will you answer me one question, Mr. Trevor?"

"What is it?"

"Will you tell me whether you are guilty or not?"

"Why do you wish to know?"

"I wish to tell my sister the truth, for she has always believed you innocent of both charges, and it will be a terrible shock to her to learn what I have to tell her."

"I will tell you that I escaped through the keeper's being killed, but I did not kill him."

"I so felt that you did not. But, who did?"

"That secret goes with me to my grave, for my lips are forever sealed."

"This is wrong to yourself."

"Right or wrong, New York Nat, it is my decision, and I die unconfessed."

"To you I will say that I did not know the keeper was dead until after I left this jail. I could not return then, for other lives than mine were at stake. I went West to the gold mines, and misfortune dogged me. I became a gambler, and at once won large sums. Recognized by a man from this town, I was arrested, brought here, and you know how soon the end will be."

"By neither word nor act will I betray the guilty one, though Heaven knows that, some day, I hope the mystery will be cleared away, that people will know I was murdered by the law, hanged solely through circumstantial evidence, and the dishonor that will rest upon my grave will be removed, the cloud upon my life will be lifted, not for my own sake, but for the sake of those who love me, but who now, in my last moments of life, are far away."

New York Nat heard the words of the doomed man with quivering lips, and for a moment made no reply, but then said, in a low and earnest tone:

"Mr. Trevor, you know who and what I am, and I swear to you now, that, though you die upon the gallows, and fill a dishonored grave, I will yet prove to the officers of the law that they hanged an innocent man; I will yet make the men who sat in the jury box and pronounced you guilty, feel what it is to be haunted by a great wrong committed, and those who now are crowding here to see you die shall know that the scene they gazed upon was but a judicial murder."

"I swear this, Mr. Trevor, for my sister and for my Boy Ferrets, and I will work to this end."

The handsome face of the prisoner lighted up at this, and he said quickly:

"I have something to say to you. In the safe in this jail I have some sealed packages, contents unknown to all save myself. They were to be addressed by me, as my last act, to a certain person. I have changed my mind in regard to them, and if you will call the jailor I will tell him to bring them to me now, and along with them some sealing wax and a candle."

The keeper was called, and he soon brought two heavy linen envelopes, sealed, and a candle and sealing wax with them.

Taking a pen, the prisoner wrote, in a bold hand upon the back of each:

"To be delivered only to

"NATHANIEL NORTON, Detective, when he makes the demand for them."

This he signed in the presence of the waiting clergyman, the jailor, and three other witnesses, while, taking his badge, New York Nat pressed it as a seal upon the sealing wax, firmly securing the packages from being tampered with.

"Now, Brandon, you will lock these papers in your safe, to be delivered only to this young man. Pardon me now, if I ask a few more words alone with him."

The others withdrew, wondering how it was that the youth had unsealed the lips of the doomed man, for they did not know the truth, that the seal of silence was still unbroken.

"Now, my good friend, when you have solved the mystery you have sworn to do, come and get those papers, but not before, and they will prove to you how much I appreciate that you will lift the dishonor of guilt from my grave, even though I died an ignominious death upon the gallows."

"I have a favor to ask of you, though it is one you may find hard to grant."

"Name it!"

"In all the crowd who will gather to see me hanged to-day, for in this State executions are public, I will not have one

friend, for good people do not like to acknowledge felons as bound by the ties of friendship, no matter what they may have been in the past. I have no excuses to give for my past, no explanation, no confessions to make. I am no coward, and will face death without a tremor, but I wish you to go with me, yours to be the last hand that I clasp on earth. Will you grant this?"

"I will," was New York Nat's firm response, but made with quivering lips.

CHAPTER IV.

THE QUEEN OF THE FERRETS.

Seated in a grove upon a bluff looking over the Hudson River, yet within the limits of New York City, was a young girl, book in hand.

She had just come from a cosy cottage a hundred yards distant, one of the very few houses in that sparsely settled district, for the streets had not yet been cut entirely through from river to river.

"Nat said he would be back yesterday, and has not yet returned; but I will not worry about him, for something has detained him he had not expected."

"It is hard, though, not to worry when he is behind time, when I know the desperately dangerous life he is leading, not only as a ferret, but as one whom the police and detectives themselves are as anxious to find as they are a wanted crook."

"But brother Nat is a born detective, and enjoys the life he is leading, while he is certainly heaping up rewards in the hands of the chief of the Secret Service which will make us and the Boy Ferrets rich when all is divided."

"I will not worry, for, somehow, he turns up all right, no matter what the difficulties and dangers he encounters. Ah!"

The exclamation was caused by a shadow falling upon the book she held, and, glancing up, she beheld a roughly-dressed, evil-faced man within a few feet of her.

She was a very beautiful girl, was this sister of New York Nat, one whose face and form would command admiration everywhere. She had the same clean-cut features of her brother, the same look of cool daring determination.

Her face flushed at sight of the man, as he rudely gazed upon her, but, without showing any fear, she asked quietly:

"Well, sir, what do you want here?"

"I'm just meandering."

"Well, just meander on, for these are private grounds."

"Well, I'm tired and wants ter rest, and there's room enough on that bench fer two."

"You are welcome to the bench, and I'll go to the house; but, as you may feel lonely, I'll send Grip, the bulldog, out to keep you company," and Olive rose, with no sign of fear, to walk away, when the man said sternly:

"Hold on, girl, fer I came here fer a talk with you!"

"I generally pick those I choose to converse with, so you must excuse me."

"I picks them, too, that I wants ter talk to, and I has picked you, so just sit down and hear what I has ter say."

"You are welcome to the seat, for I will remain standing."

The man arose from the bench and said:

"Sit down and hear me, for I has something to say that it is to your interest to hear."

"Be brief, please," and Olive resumed her seat, as though to show the man she had no fear of him. "Now, what have you to say?"

"Fust, I'll tell you that I knows yer." "Many know me."

The Girl Mascot's Best Score.

"They knows yer only as Miss Olive Chandler, a artist, but I knows who you be."

"You just said Olive Chandler, an artist," and the young girl somehow began to dread the ordeal she felt was coming.

"I knows what else you is."

"What am I? may I ask?"

"A detective."

"Indeed! What makes you think so?"

"I knows so fer sure, miss!"

"Well, what of it?"

"It was the gang of which you is ther mascot, or queen, as they calls yer, that run down me and my pals, and sent one o' em ter ther gallows and two more of us ter prison. I was one of them as went ter prison, but escaped, and, with one o' my pals hanged, and t'other in jail for life, I'm friendless, poor, and in need, so I comes to you for help."

The girl never flinched, but replied:

"Had you come to me as a poor man in distress, I would have helped you, but to come as a self-confessed convict, and an escaped felon, and demand help, let me tell you plainly that you have made a mistake in thinking you can frighten me."

"Has I? Let us see if I has. I knows yer and yer brother. I knows yer as a girl who, with yer brother, got together a lot o' young jail-birds and made 'em reform, turning 'em inter detectives, and havin' been crooks themselves, they makes good crook hunters; so yer helps ther police, but fools 'em, and they don't know yer, or whar yer layout is; but I knows, and it's wuth money ter me ter keep my mouth shut, I guesses."

"And how did you learn so much about me and mine?"

"I knows more."

"Out with it!"

"I knows that you boards in that cottage with a widow woman, and yer brother has his dive elsewhere, and the Ferrets meet there. Yer used ter meet in ther miser's haunted house, but yer remembers ther crooks got onto ther secret and was goin' ter down yer, but yer downed them. I were one yer didn't down jist then, though yer brother run me in arter that and I went up ter Sing Sing fer my health."

"I kept my own council; I told nobody what I knewed, and determined ter escape some day and live off of your gang. I has shaddered yer like a bloodhound; I knows you is ther Queen, and I has seen what none of yer gang has, yer face, for yer goes masked afore them, and is unknown save as ther Queen."

"I knows that yer brother is chief, that he is as clever as Satan, and fine as silk—soft as velvet, but hard as brass. He's a dandy, and his name is New York Nat."

"I'll tell yer more if yer wishes, but I thinks I has said enough fer yer ter see that yer hed better strike a bargain with a poor man—one who is deep in sorrow ter-day, fer I has a friend who was hanged yesterday. I tried ter git out in time ter go to his hanging, and see how he'd die, but I didn't have ther price ter take ther ears, and so didn't go. But I've come to you, for I wants money—a reg'lar monthly salary, ter help me ter a honest life, and ter live like a gent."

"Now, what terms do you offer, Queen o' the Unknown Ferrets?"

"I suppose money alone will buy you off, but I have not much with me now, so you will have to come again. What I have will keep you safe until you come again." And, putting her book down, the Ferret Queen placed her hand in her pocket, and when she withdrew it a cocked revolver was leveled full at the head of the convict, who heard the words:

"Quick! Sit down on that bench, or I will kill you!"

CHAPTER V.

CAUGHT IN HIS OWN TRAP.

"Oh, wrap me up and sell me cheap fer a durned fool!"

Such was the expressive remark of the convict, when, after looking into the muzzle of the revolver, then at the little hand that held it, and which was as firm as a rock, and, last, into the eyes of the girl, he sat down upon the bench as she had ordered.

Still keeping him covered, Olive placed two of the fingers of her left hand into her mouth, using them as a whistle, and gave three sharp blasts.

They were answered by a loud bark, and a moment after a huge bulldog sprang over the gate leading into the little cottage and came tearing toward the grove like mad.

The man uttered an exclamation of terror, and seemed for an instant about to fly, then, as though he would spring upon the girl and wrest the weapon from her to protect himself from the dog, but obeyed her stern command:

"Keep your seat! If you obey me you are safe."

The man did keep his seat, his face livid, his form quivering, for the bulldog was about the size of a flour barrel, and had a head on him like a buffalo.

As for his teeth, a shark might have envied him on that point.

Reaching the point he seemed to desire at once to chew the convict up; but, obeying the command of Olive, he laid down to await further developments.

He kept his eyes on the convict, however, and uttered a low, droning growl as though giving advice—at least the man so considered it, and did not dare move.

"Now we can come to more satisfactory terms," Olive quietly remarked.

"Give me what money yer has and I'll git, for I doesn't like that catfish."

"Don't insult Tiger, for he is a good dog, and will obey me if I tell him to take you by the throat."

"I hain't sayin' a word. Only I has a engagement and wishes to keep it."

"A man just escaped from prison can have no engagements; besides, you came here especially to see me, and I will not let you leave so soon."

"What does yer want?"

"I wish to ask you a few questions, with Tiger as a witness."

"What has yer got ter say?"

"How did you escape from prison?"

"I was helped out by a friend."

"Was your friend inside or out?"

"Outside."

"On the contrary, he was on the inside, one of the guards. You gained a good name by your perfect behavior, and by once betraying an intention of your comrades to make a break for liberty."

"You pretended that there were men who would kill you if you ever got out of prison, and said that you preferred to remain there. In this way you deceived the keepers, and were trusted. You were working your cards to escape, all the time—"

"That dog is crawlin' closer to me, miss!"

"He hears my story and knows how wicked you are. You escaped by getting a guard off to one side, pretending you had to tell him something, and so you killed him and made your escape. I have read the papers to-day and know the whole story, for the guard told all before he died. You found a boatman not far away, but he did not recognize your garb in the darkness, and was seen to row off on the river with you. The boat was found at Jersey City yesterday afternoon, and there were blood stains in it, so you must have killed the poor fellow and taken his clothes."

"On the police books you are known as Fatal Fred, the burglar, as you always take a human life when you commit your robberies. The whole story, told at your trial, was repeated in this morning's papers, with the added information that you would have been hanged with one of your pals, only the one who knew there was no escape for him, confessed that you had not been the one who had murdered men, as had been reported of you."

"This saved your neck and you got a life sentence, but you are out again, and having the secret of my brother's life and mine, came here to force money from me, perhaps kill me, or betray the Unknown Ferrets. But just now I have you at my mercy."

The man realized this fully.

The young girl had lowered her pistol, but the dog's eye was still upon the man, and that was enough.

She had, the moment he had spoken of escaping from prison the night before, known his as the man whose escape she had read the account of. It had been a cause of some worry to her, as she knew that New York Nat had brought him and his pards to justice.

"I'll tell yer, miss, if yer gives me a couple of hundred dollars I'll call it quits and bother yer no more, and if yer has another suit of clothes and a man's hat, with a pair o' spectacles in the cottage, I'll be obliged."

"No, you shall not go free, for I will not risk the secret we have so tried to keep, and which you would betray if you are captured."

"Yer don't intend ter kill me, does yer?" asked the man, in real alarm.

"Oh, no; but I intend to keep you safe—ah! There is Nat, now."

CHAPTER VI.

A WOLF IN SHEEP'S CLOTHING.

The one who approached was the same youth whose secret badges had gained him ready admission into the jail to see Trent Trevor two days before.

His eyes were upon the convict as he approached, and he said, pleasantly:

"You have company, I see, sir."

"There hain't no law ter make her have it ef she'll let me go, young feller," snarled the felon.

Olive laughed and, greeting her brother, said:

"I am glad to see you back, Nat, for I was a little anxious at your delay, but you wish to know about my visitor, here?"

"I do, for if he is not Fatal Fred, the burglar, I am greatly mistaken."

"No, I hain't."

"You have named him, Nat!"

"But he was in prison for life."

"Yes, but he escaped. Have you seen the papers this morning?"

"No; I have not had time to read anything."

"The whole story is there, of how he killed a guard in escaping; it is supposed, also, that he killed a boatman and got his clothes, and the whole detective force are on the lookout for him and I am fearful they may find him."

"Why fearful, sis?" asked Nat, in surprise.

"You know you sent him up?"

"Yes."

"Well, he had been shadowing us, and never told a word he knew of the Ferrets at his trial, but kept his secret for his escape."

"Ah! I see!"

"He has shadowed us well; he knows me as the Mascot and you as New York Nat, chief of the Unknown Ferrets, and says he knows your retreat."

"He came here to demand money, but,

The Girl Mascot's Best Score.

though I knew when he said he had escaped from prison that he was Fatal Fred, I could not have him arrested, knowing the secret he does, as he would betray us."

"You are right, sis."

"So I called Tiger to help me, and covered him with my revolver, intending to hold him a prisoner here until night, and then, with Tiger, escort him to your retreat and make sure of him."

"You are a brave little woman, sis, and always do just right. Fortunately, it is getting dark now, so I will walk him to my retreat; but we must disguise him better than he is, or some sharp-eyed detective will recognize him; and, arrested, his first act would be to betray us."

"Does yer intend ter take me to your retreat to kill me, young feller?"

"I have not decided."

"It is meeting night, you know, Nat?"

"So much the better, sis. And now as I cannot leave the man, you go in, please, and bring out a disguise for him, and we will go together."

"What shall it be, Nat?"

"He is clean shaven, or nearly so, and has cropped hair, so I'll try and make a priest out of him. Get the black clerical suit, high hat and a pair of spectacles."

"All right," and Olive turned away, leaving Nat and Tiger still guarding the felon.

"So you thought you would frighten the Queen of the Ferrets into buying you off, did you?"

"I wants money, and if you gives me some I'll git so far you'll never hear of me agin."

"I do not wish to lose sight of you, Fatal Fred, but keep you for future reference, when it can do us no harm for you to betray us. What my Ferrets have done has gained them pardon, a dozen times over, for any sins they were guilty of in the past, but we are not yet ready to be known and we do not intend that you shall betray us."

"That sounds as if you was going to do me."

"No, we take no life on our hands and consciences which we are not compelled to do, but I do not intend you shall harm us, and your future liberty depends upon your behavior and what you can do to help us," said Nat, who did not recall just then what Olive had told him of how the convict had escaped by taking a life, perhaps.

In a short while Olive returned to the grove with a satchel, in which was the disguise, and said:

"I will get ready to go with you, Nat," and she went back to the cottage just as night came on.

Nat took the suit and ordered the convict to put it on, along with the white collar and black stock and the spectacles.

The hat was not a good fit, but would do, and, placing the other suit in the satchel, Nat said:

"You make a very wicked looking preacher, but you will do in the dark. You carry the satchel and let me tell you that I do not intend to take the dog along, but if you make an attempt to escape, I'll simply kill you and report that you are Fatal Fred, that I had captured you, and trying to escape from me I shot you. Do you understand?"

"I does, fer a certainty!"

"Then come on!"

They went side by side to the gate leading into the cottage, and Olive was awaiting them.

Tiger, to his great regret, was sent into the yard, and the three set off on foot up the steep hill to where they could catch a car which would take them to the retreat of New York Nat, the Unknown Ferret.

CHAPTER VII.

TURNING THE TABLES.

New York Nat fully realized his danger in taking the convict with him as he did, for at any moment he might make a break for liberty, the moment he got into a crowd or on a car.

But the young detective was up to all kinds of tricks, utterly fearless, and accustomed to dealing with desperate men.

He determined to take no greater chances than he had to, and as a glance at the prisoner's face when they passed under the first lamp post, revealed that he was planning some act of desperation, he halted and said:

"See here, Fatal Fred, I do not intend to stand any nonsense with you. I shall kill you as I would a snake, if you attempt any trickery, and remember, if you should get the best of me, my sister here is a dead shot and quick as lightning to act. Now, there are the cars we are to take. Olive will get on first, you follow, and I will be close behind you."

The car was hailed; it was not half full, and the three entered, the supposed priest taking a seat in between Nat and his sister.

One glance along the line of passengers, and the convict became as pale as death, for the look revealed to him, almost opposite to him, a well known detective officer.

Both Nat and Olive recognized him also, and saw that the detective had caught sight of them, and regarded the "priest" with a peculiar look.

The car stopped, and Nat said, coolly:

"I suppose everything is strange to you in the city, Father Gray, coming, as you do, from an inland village?"

The convict understood why the words were uttered, and he tried to speak.

He tried hard to put on a pious expression, to appear what his dress indicated, but those bright eyes opposite fascinated him, and he seemed under a spell.

He could not reply, and was growing nervous, when Olive said quickly:

"We are coming to my street, brother, but you and Father Gray need not get off with me, for it is only a few steps."

"Yes, indeed, we'll escort you there, sis. Come, Father Gray." And Nat signaled to the conductor, the car drew up, and the three left it.

Nat saw that the detective continued on with it, as far as they could see it, and then he turned to his prisoner, to look suddenly into the muzzle of a revolver, and hear the words:

"Now it's my turn, and I'd kill a woman quick as I would a man!"

Both Nat and Olive had been so attentively watching the detective in the receding car they had not observed that the moment they arose to get out at the crossing the convict had regained his nerve, and, slipping his hand into Olive's pocket as he crowded her on the platform, he had recovered her revolver.

"Well, you are a clever one, and no mistake. A moment ago, scared to death, and now got the drop on both of us!"

Nat spoke coolly, and his words and manner slightly disconcerted the convict, but only for an instant, and then he replied:

"I wants what valuables and money you both has, and then I goes my way until—another time."

Nat was fairly caught, and knew it.

Olive was also sure of the fact, but suddenly glancing around, cried:

"Why, Tiger has followed us! Here, Tiger!"

The convict turned with an oath, to face the bulldog he so feared.

The act was fatal to his escape, for quick as a flash, New York Nat dealt his arm a severe blow, the revolver dropped

to the ground, and his own weapon was thrust into the face of the desperate man, who cried:

"I gives in! Don't shoot, and don't let that dog tackle me, nuther."

"There is no dog, except in your imagination, Fatal Fred, but it served the purpose, so all is well," remarked Olive, and the felon muttered a bitter curse upon her.

"It was clever of you, sis, so don't mind him, for his curses, like chickens, will come home to roost. Now we'll catch the next car, which appears to be empty."

"Come, Fatal Fred, but remember, if you are taken by the police you hang, and your revenge upon us, in betraying us, will hardly compensate for your dance of death at the end of the rope. Get on, and no nonsense."

They got upon the car, took seats as before, and rode undisturbed to the street where they left the car to go to the retreat, though there then were three police officers upon the car.

The retreat was up town, not far from Central Park, and a handsome mansion, in which, it was currently reported, several murders had been committed, and hence it had an unsavory record, and for a long time had remained vacated, until Nat, as an alleged professor of music, unheeding the tales told of its being haunted, had rented it furnished.

There was no house opposite, few near by, and no one was near when Nat ascended the steps with his prisoner, and, taking a key from his pocket, entered the door, Olive following soon after, for she had delayed for a moment to place a flesh like mask upon her face.

CHAPTER VIII.

A PRICE ON HIS HEAD.

The mansion which had been turned into the Ferrets' retreat was a large and substantial one, double width and four stories high.

Once it had been an elegant home of a foreigner—a Spaniard, who had mysteriously vacated it, and furnished as it was, it was seemingly left to go to ruin. After long neglect, however, it was rented by a down-town agency. Nat had had his eye on the place for some time, and quickly answered the placard "For Rent" by securing it as an "academy" for a German professor of music, and no one doubted but that the sign in the front window told the truth, and that the well-disguised man who passed in and out was the "professor," and the Ferrets, in all manners of disguises, were the "pupils."

There was a piano in the house, and other musical instruments had been purchased and taken there, while the billiard room on the third floor had been fitted up as a "music room," but in reality was where the band of Unknown Ferrets held their weekly meetings at night.

There were seats there for the band, and a table, with two arm-chairs behind it for the Ferret captain and the Queen, who was also the secretary and treasurer of the mysterious league—a lot of youths banded together for Secret Service work, true as steel to each other, and to their loved chief and Queen—though, as their mascot, they only knew the latter.

In the building Nat had his own quarters and in a raid upon the premises detectives would have had to admit that it seemed no more than the home of a music teacher.

A huge dog was New York Nat's companion, half-bloodhound, half-mastiff. The big brute answered to the name of Guard, a name which well suited him.

Every member of the band the dog knew; he met all callers at the inner door when it was opened, and woe unto the one who could not give the password to

The Girl Mascot's Best Score.

Guard, or, in other words, make themselves known to him.

He had the run of the house from cellar to attic, never barked, and moved about so quietly that his presence was only known by his appearance at Nat's or Olive's call.

Each member of the band had his own pass-key, and when entering would go to the "Lodge Room," if it was meeting night, or to Nat's room if they wished to see him particularly.

When Nat and the convict entered, a gas-jet in the hall gave a dim light, but sufficient for the prisoner to behold the dog, several sizes larger than was the bulldog, Tiger.

"My Lord! What is that?" gasped the convict.

"Only my dog."

"He looks like a bear."

"He is a good dog, and knows his business. I've known him to kill men."

"Oh, Lord! don't let him get at me."

Nat turned the gas up, and just then Olive came in, her face masked; but the dog seemed more interested just then in the prisoner, and sniffed him all over in a very alarming way.

"Come, Fatal Fred, I'll be hospitable, and take you to your room. But, first, are you hungry?"

"Starved!"

"Then I'll get you some supper, soon. No crooked dodging, now, for Guard will jump you at the first break you make."

With this Nat ordered the prisoner to go ahead of him up-stairs, and as they reached the third floor, he said:

"Some of the boys are there, sis, so go in, and I'll soon be down; but send Keno up to me, please."

He took a match from his pocket, lighted the hall gas, opened a door in the middle of the house, revealing what appeared to be a large closet. But a door was beyond, and opening this an inside room was revealed.

There was no window, no other door opening into it, but a skylight in the roof above.

A table, easy-chair and cot were the room's only furniture, and a lamp was upon the table.

This Nat lighted, and, stepping to the cot, he threw up the mattress and lifted out a long steel chain, with rings and a padlock at each end. Then taking from his pocket a pair of steel manacles, connected by a chain, Nat said:

"Here, Fatal Fred, you must put these on."

The felon started, his eyes glittered, he glanced at the youth as though about to spring upon him, but heard the quiet words:

"I'm armed, you know, and, besides, Guard has his eye upon you."

The convict saw the dog, as though ready for a spring, groaned, and made no resistance to Nat's slipping the manacles upon his ankles.

Then the young detective locked one end of the long chain about the short one which connected the manacles, and the other around the iron bed.

"The chain allows you to move about, but the bed is too large to get through that door without taking it apart, and you have not the tools to do that."

"That skylight will give you air and light by day, and Guard will be your keeper, for the door cannot be closed from the inside, you see; but, in fact, he sleeps in this room."

"I'll bring you some supper soon, and your meals each day. Ah, Keno, glad to see you." And Nat turned as a tall, slender youth entered the room.

"You have a prisoner, captain, I see?"

"Yes; do you know him?" And Nat

took the prisoner's hat and spectacles off, and the young crook-shadower, known as Keno, looking fixedly at the man.

"Yes, sir; and you have caught him? It is Fatal Fred, the burglar, in for life, but who escaped two nights ago by killing the guard; then he got a boatman to put him across the river, and took his life also, and exchanged clothing with him. Why, captain, there is a cool five thousand reward on this man already."

"I see that you know him, but he is worse than I thought, from what you tell me, Keno, so we will have to be very careful of so valuable a catch. But, come, I wish to tell you something," and the two Ferrets left the prisoner to his own bitter thoughts, and in the charge of Guard.

CHAPTER IX.

THE COUNCIL OF THE UNKNOWN.

The Ferret Captain and Keno after a short talk, entered the lodge room.

There sat the fair Mascot behind the table, several large books before her, and she was engaged in writing.

Upon the chairs before the table were the motley crew that formed the Boy Ferrets' League, but which they were pleased to term the "Secret Boy Police."

Keno went to a seat, and New York Nat's entrance was greeted with a rising salute.

All was still, for the youths had not cared to disturb their masked Girl Mascot in her work.

It was a strange scene that New York Nat looked upon, a queer group, and faces were as different as forms and costumes.

It was a full gathering, too, for the boys had come from their various occupations to report their work for the week in their respective shadowing undertakings.

In the front row sat Shorty, Slim, Sly, Skip, Dodge, Doc, and Foxey, known as the "Loafer Ferrets," as their main duty was to circulate about the city picking up what news they could.

Then there was Freckles, who kept a down-town news-stand, while by his side sat Fatty, a newsboy, with Rip, a wharf-rat, and Blow, a sailor boy, to the right.

Chub was a bootblack, Teaser a district messenger boy; Flip, a hotel bell-boy, with Wing Lung and Woo Choo, two young Chinamen whom New York Nat had picked up in the West and brought to New York, where they established themselves in a laundry.

Next came Parson, a telegraph messenger, and Keno, who was a clerk right in the Police Headquarters, and was thus able to discover much that was going on, which otherwise would not have been known to the band.

There were several others, then away on special duty, and this made up the clan of the Unknown Ferrets, of whom New York Nat was the able and daring leader.

Rapping for order, the young captain at once called upon the boys separately for their weekly reports of discoveries made and work done.

They were delivered written, some in more or less phenomenal writing and spelling, and were filed away by the girl queen, acting secretary, in a large book.

Then, acting as treasurer, she paid each one his week's expenses and allowance, and made her report of the cash on hand, the amount in bank, and what had been gotten in through rewards and the various revenues.

This work attended to, New York Nat said:

"I now have a special duty for you all to enter upon, but which I am not yet ready to explain to you, so will call a special meeting for to-morrow night."

"I have been away, as you know, upon the bank robbery case at Erie, and while absent fell upon a remarkably interesting mystery, which I am determined to solve, and which I will explain to you all to-morrow night, and let you take your time in running down."

"When I came in to-night I brought a prisoner with me, one whom you all know by his name and his red deeds. Keno tells me that there is a reward of five thousand dollars for the man, dead or alive."

"Unfortunately, we cannot collect the reward—at least, not just now—for he knows our secret, and where to find us, so he must be held a prisoner here until such time as we can surrender him to the chief of the Secret Service, and that can only be when we are ready to dismiss our band, take our earnings, and go our separate ways."

"But he will keep, though I do not like the idea of keeping a prisoner here. Still, it must be done. The prisoner is Fatal Fred, the burglar, who escaped from prison several nights ago."

These words created a sensation, for all of the Ferrets had that day read the story of his escape and double crime.

"We might kill him and send him in, Cap'n Nat, for he couldn't tell nuthin' if he was dead," said Rip, who had the name of being the worst hoodlum of the band.

"As I do not believe you are in earnest, Rip, I will not reprove your remark as otherwise it would deserve," replied Nat, sternly, and the amusement created by the suggestion of Rip at once ceased.

"I wish you to go, one by one, up to the prison room, and take a good look at the prisoner, so there will be no mistake about your recognizing him if ever called upon to do so."

"He was captured by your Queen, here, whom was trying to frighten into buying him off, as he knew who she is, something that not one of you do, so you can understand he is a very dangerous individual to surrender and be allowed to talk."

"Now the meeting is adjourned until to-morrow night, when you are to hear what I have to tell you."

The boys arose and began to file from the room, one by one, to go up-stairs and have a look at the prisoner.

As Keno was going out, New York Nat called to him:

"I am a little suspicious of Rip, and have been of late from several things he has said and done."

"Get Doc, Teaser and Flip to help you, and shadow him close, and if you see anything that makes you suspect him, send him to me here on a message."

Keno looked surprised, but responded promptly:

"All right, Cap'n Nat, I will."

"We cannot afford to take any chances."

After taking a close look at the prisoner, each one of the youths filed out of the room and left the house by twos and threes, except Rip, who went alone.

But he was shadowed from the moment he left the retreat.

CHAPTER X.

THE CASE OF TRENT TREVOR.

When the Ferrets had left the mansion, Guard escorting each one of them to the door, as though counting them, New York Nat was left alone with Olive, who was all ready to start for her home, waiting for her brother to accompany her, as he always did.

"Sit down, sis, for I have something to say to you," he said.

The girl resumed her seat, and Nat said:

The Girl Mascot's Best Score.

"I fear I have got to cause you sorrow, sis, for I am going to tell you of the death of one whom you regarded most highly."

"Ah, Nat! Who can it be?"

"You remember the gentleman who rescued you one night, years ago, when you were a flower girl, and two men kidnapped you?"

"Yes, indeed; I can never forget him, or that he was accused of having killed and robbed Blenheim, the pawnbroker, and he was arrested, but escaped from prison, it was said, by killing the jailer; but I never believed that he was guilty in either case, and all the search I made in the matter showed that he was as innocent of one crime as he was found to be of the other."

"Is he dead, brother?"

"Yes."

"I am very, very sorry, and he has died with a cloud upon his name."

"Knowing that he was innocent of robbing and killing Blenheim, sis, it does not seem to me that he would have killed the keeper to escape, even before he had been tried."

"True!"

"But he went West, after his escape, and no one could trace him, I believe."

"Yes, sis; he was traced, after several years, or, rather, recognized by a man who knew him, in the town where he lived, and, failing in business, had gone West."

"Wishing to replenish his purse with the reward offered for Mr. Trevor, the man betrayed his whereabouts and he was arrested at his gambling saloon, for he had taken to gambling, and was brought East, tried, found guilty of the keeper's murder and—"

"Oh, Nat! Did they hang him?" cried Olive, excitedly.

"Yes, and I wish to tell you a strange coincidence of how I discovered the fact."

Then New York Nat told the story of how he had been delayed at the railway junction, and thus had heard of the hanging of Trent Trevor, and had gone to visit him in the jail, and what had followed. Continuing, he said:

"Now, when he asked me, as his only friend, to go with him to the gallows, I could not refuse."

"No, you did right, brother, for I even would not have refused had I been there and could have added one comfort to him in his last hours, for what must his thoughts have been—hanged for a crime of which he was innocent, for I believe that he told you the truth."

"I feel sure of it, sis."

"I went with him to the gallows, walking side by side with him."

"Every one was astounded at his utterly fearless bearing, for a soldier could not have gone into battle with the hope of winning fame with less dread of death than he showed. Once only his face flushed, and he said then it was at the shame of his ignominious death."

"But he ascended the gallows with the same firm step, thanked the officials for their kindness to him, and, grasping my hand, said:

"Remember your pledge. Give my regards to your little sister, and—good-by."

"His grasp of the hand was firm, he submitted to being bound in silence, did not flinch."

"I claimed his body, which otherwise would have filled a nameless grave, and I placed it in the hands of an undertaker for burial, paying him to furnish a handsome coffin, and ordering a small marble column to be placed above him, with his name, date of death and the words:

"The day will come!"

"I could not, of course, go on my way that day, so I remained to see him buried

at sunset, in a lot I bought for him, and the kind minister who had tried to console him in his last hours read the funeral services over him, no one else being present save the undertaker and his assistants, and one lady, dressed in black, and deeply veiled.

"Who she was no one knew, but I heard her sobbing and saw her form quivering with emotion."

"Who can she have been?"

"Some one, the clergyman and undertaker thought, in the cemetery at the time visiting loved ones' graves, and came to the funeral, but such was not the case."

"You shadowed her, then?"

"Yes, to her home, and she lives in a neighboring town, and is the wife of a rich man. Some day I may visit her to get certain information, for I intend to prove to the world that Trent Trevor was innocent."

"And I will help you all in my power, brother," was the earnest response of the Girl Queen of the Ferrets.

CHAPTER XI.

THE SAME SECRET.

"Say, young feller, don't you want to git into a deal for dust?"

The speaker was a young man dressed like a dude, with his hair curled, his hat set back on his head, eye-glasses, a cane and a flushed face.

The one he addressed was a very hard-faced youth, roughly dressed and apparently ready for anything from a fight to a foot race, though he looked very nervous just then and was standing half a block away from Police Headquarters, apparently watching the entrance as though interested in the going in or coming out of some one.

"What's in it, dude?" he asked, in a sly way, answering the question of the young man.

"There's a great deal in it for me, and a snug pile for you."

"What's the game?"

"Do I look like a fool?"

"You looks like a dude, and all dudes is fools!"

"You have cut your eye teeth, I see, and I want a shrewd, sharp youngster to help me."

"What's yer bis?"

"Making money."

"Then I'm in it with both feet."

"What do you do?"

"Anything, everything, nothing."

"Good!"

"I want just such a fellow to help me."

"Sing your song and I'll catch on to ther tune."

"First, I'm a detective."

The youth started visibly, his face paled and he gasped as he looked at the young man, who said:

"Don't get scared, for, though you have no doubt done enough to hang you, I'm not shadowing you."

"I'm a detective, as I said, and I've got on to a great secret. It is one that will pay big money, but if I get a Ferret pard to help me, he will demand half of the gain—see!"

"I hain't blind."

"So you wants to pay me what you choose, and you git it all?"

"No, I will pay you twenty-five per cent of the gross earnings."

"Will there be much?"

"I know that there is in sight five thousand in one pile, three thousand in another and one thousand in another."

"Ge nill! What's it all about?"

"That isn't all, for in another lot there is everything from five to fifteen thousand."

"And me twenty-five per cent?"

"Yes."

"I'm yer huckleberry. What's the game?"

"Where do you live?"

"Anywhere night catches onto me."

"No home?"

"Not a photograph of any."

"Any parents?"

"Don't know him if I has. Been dis-inherited from the home pile."

"Any friends?"

"One."

"Who?"

"Here," and the youth took a roll of bills out of his pocket.

"I see you are a sharp one."

"Oh, I'm all right. Now, what's to be done?"

"Get the rewards out for a man who is wanted, for that is what I need you for."

"See here, you is a detective."

"Yes."

"Well, I has a leetle game ter play, too, and I were jist layin' here to catch some detective I knows by sight ter run me in ter see the chief, for I has something to tell there's money in, too. You can help me, and I goes you twenty-five per cent., as you does me, if you fix it so I don't get jailed and gets my dust. What does yer say?"

"It's a bargain, but to my game first, for we can't delay."

"Shout!"

"Have you ever heard of Fatal Fred, the burglar?"

The young hoodlum started and answered:

"Yes, I have heard of him."

"Do you know what he has been up to lately?"

"I does."

"Well, the police and Secret Service force are on a blind trail, and think he has been drowned or been killed, since they can get no clew to him. But they are away off."

"They is?"

"Yes, and he is the one that the chief of police offers five thousand for, dead or alive, the prison authorities two thousand and the family of the boatman he murdered a thousand more."

"Then he made money by his burglaries and has it hidden away, confessing nothing when he went to prison, intending to escape and enjoy it."

"I see, said the blind man."

"Now, I know where he is, and with your aid we can run him into the chief's quarters and get our rewards."

"Is he in this city?"

"He is, in a house I saw him enter, disguised as a priest, and accompanied by a young man and a girl."

"See here, cully, I guess you knows, and I knows, too, for it were Fatal Fred that I had in my mind ter tell to ther chief for what I could get out of it. Yes, we is onto ther same racket, and I'm with you, so now we knows each other A to etcetera, so say your say and I'll say mine and we'll add up ther figgers—see?"

"I do see, and we will make a good thing out of this affair," and they walked off together.

CHAPTER XII.

LED ASTRAY.

The two, apparently so ill-matched, walked along until they came to a place where boats could be hired.

Here they halted, the detective paid the price, and entering a neat skiff they started for an hour's row upon the river, the hoodlum pulling the oars.

When out of all fear of being overheard, the detective said:

"Now I'll give you my game, as you call it, in full."

"Spout!"

"You see, I wish to make all I can, and to get out of this business."

"Yes."

"If I called in the aid of a fellow-detective, he would get an equal divvy, while to you a quarter of the sum will be big money."

"You bet; but she goes at a quarter; no more, no less."

"That is understood."

"Now, the rewards say 'dead or alive.'"

"Yes."

"The man is safe in a house I know, and I don't believe but one person lives there; but we may have to make a fight to get him, and maybe will have to put the man himself to sleep."

"That's easy."

"Now, I want you to go to the house with my keys, for we'll watch and see when the one who dwells there goes out; you can enter, for I've a key that will fit any lock, and there is no one near to see, and you can find the man. You must go ready to put him to sleep if you have to, and then call me in, for I'll have a carriage near, and we'll get the body and carry it to Police Headquarters. See?"

"Yes."

"I'll state that you recognized the prisoner and knew me, and we dogged him there and caught him, together, but I had to kill him, as he attacked us."

"We'll run him in, either dead or alive, as circumstances may happen."

"Take him dead is safest, for he may tell something that will knock me out of some dust."

"You will have to put him to sleep, then."

"I kin do it, and never blink an eye."

"How?"

"Why, we'll take him to cross the river after we get his dust, and let him fall overboard, with a rope to him, and we kin say he jumped over, preferrin' ter die than be hanged. See?"

"A good idea."

"And we kin git all his dust."

"Yes."

"Now, pal, I wants yer ter listen ter me."

"Well?"

"I knows where Fatal Fred is."

"Tell me."

"Now, there is a gang o' Hoodlum, or Gamin Ferrets, in this city, who has been playin' a dead sure game on ther police and detectives. I guesses nigh about all of 'em is pickled."

"Pickled?"

"Well, salted down as jail-birds, fer they was tough citizens until a missionary young man and a gal got 'em to reform. They didn't give no Salvation Army lay-out on that, but they, hevin' been crooks themselves, they laid out to catch 'em, and organized a band o' ferrets."

"They has worked diligent for two things—pardon fer their own sins and ther rewards for catchin' crooks. See?"

"I do."

"They hopes to spring themselves some day from thet ther Secret Service chief, with a halo around their heads, and git pardon fer what they has done, and ther money to their credit fer rewards."

"Go on!"

"Now, they is reformed in my eye, Betty Martin."

"They are not honest, then, in their reformation?"

"Nary."

"I'm one of 'em, and does yer see any halo around my gourd, does yer hear me singin' psalms?"

"I do not."

"Now, if ther Secret Service Mogul pays for it, I can hand over this gang to him, but I must get my money and my

pardon, you getting your twenty-five per cent. o' ther cash, and of ther pardon, too, if yer needs it."

"Good!"

"Ther chief wants ter find 'em, fer he can't place 'em ter save him, no matter how hard he tries."

"Now, does you play this game with me, pal?"

"Indeed, I will."

"You can work it for my pardon and all?"

"Yes."

"Then we is in it fer keeps, and I'll tell you that ther place whar Fatal Fred is in hiding is the retreat of them young Ferrets, for he is a prisoner there, and they intended ter give him up themselves some day, C. O. D."

"Now, you knows it all, as I does, and we can work the racket for all there is in it."

"We will!" was the eager response, and the boat's prow was turned back toward the starting-point, while the detective asked:

"What is your name?"

"Rip."

CHAPTER XIII.

PUT TO SLEEP.

"There is the mansion—is it the one you meant?" asked the detective, as late in the afternoon he had gone past the Ferrets' retreat, accompanied by the youth with whom he had entered into a compact.

"That's ther dive."

"Well, the young man is not there, for I saw him go out before you came here to meet me."

"Then I'll go and see how things lay for a talk with ther prisoner."

"Yes."

"When I gits things down fine I'll come out and tell yer, and we kin go and walk off with ther cove to where we has our boat waitin'."

"I guess I'd better give him ther sleepin' potion arter he gives it 'way whar his boodle is hid, for he drowns easier—see?"

"All right, we'll decide on that when we know where his plunder is."

"Now go."

The youth walked off toward the mansion.

It was just twilight, and there was no street lamp within half a block of the house.

No one seemed to be about the streets just then and the youth ascended the steps, opened the door with a pass-key he had with him and entered.

Guard heard the key enter the lock, and was on hand to welcome the visitor.

He recognized him, greeted him with a wag of the tail and followed him in his going over the house to see if any one was there.

Going up to the top floor the youth lighted the gas in the upper hall and made his way into the prison room.

Striking a match he lighted the lamp and revealed the prisoner lying upon his cot.

Some dishes were on the table, showing that he had just had supper, and the man gazed at him with some surprise, remarking:

"You is one of the gang?"

"Yes."

"I has only seen ther captain ther two days I has been here."

"Where is he?"

"Gone out."

"Did he say where?"

"He told that durned dog thar ter keep watch o' me, as he'd be gone some time."

"There is no chance for you with dat dog around!"

"No; he watches me all ther time and I is afraid he'll jump onto me if I moves."

"He is a bad one, but he knows me."

"He seems to."

"See here, pal, hain't you gettin' sore at ther thought they is goin' ter hang yer?"

"Does yer think I has no feelin's?"

"Well, I has, and good ones, and I don't want ter see you hang if I kin help it."

The prisoner sat up so quickly in bed that Guard came into the room on a jump.

"Go out, Guard. I'm on duty now," commanded the youth, and the dog obeyed.

"Did I hear you jist right, young feller," eagerly said the man.

"I said I didn't want ter see yer hung I hain't no hard-hearted feller, as long as I kin help you, and git dust fer ther job."

"Young feller, you built me up ter pul me all down agin, fer I hain't got a dollar in ther world. My pal as got hanged knew whar ther dust was we had laid up but he wouldn't tell nobody, and so I've got nothin', so if yer were goin' ter save me this minit for five dollars I cuā not give it to yer."

The youth's face underwent a change for he seemed to feel that the man was telling the truth.

For a moment he was silent, and then he said:

"Pal, I wants money and I wants it bad, but I intends ter help you."

The prisoner grew intensely excited and the youth continued:

"Keep cool, now, and I'll arrange ter help yer out o' here. I has a pard as has a boat, and he hain't far away, so I kin send him to ther river ter wait fer us, and he can put you on the Jersey shore, and you kin tramp it through ther country in that disguise, while I has a little money I'll give yer."

"Why do you do this?"

"Ter squar' myself with ther gang."

"I'll go, now, and see that friend o' mine ter hev ther boat ready fur us."

"But kin you git these bracelets off of me?"

"Yes, I has keys as will unlock 'em; but say, pal, would yer like ter hev a drink ter steady yer narves?"

"Would a cat catch a rat?"

"It would make a new man o' me, so fetch me some."

"I has a flask with me," and the youth took a flask from his pocket and handed it to the prisoner, who placed it to his lips.

Then the youth put the flask to his lips, after which he left the room and the house, Guard escorting him to the door.

The detective was waiting for him, and asked, anxiously:

"Did you see him?"

"You bet!"

"Well?"

"He hain't got a dollar on earth!"

"Are you sure?"

The youth related the conversation between the prisoner and himself, and the detective seemed satisfied.

Then the young hoodlum continued:

"Yer see, if we tuk him in alive, he'd squeal ter save himself, and give ther hull thing o' ther Ferrets' retreat away and knock us out."

"Now, I hain't no lawyer, but my idea is that a man under life sentence can't be punished no more, so they'd get all they could from him and send him back ter prjson again."

"Well?"

"But we'd lose our grip on betrayin' ther Ferrets."

"That is so."

The Girl Mascot's Best Score.

"So we has got ter take him in dead, and I kin do the squealin' on ther Ferrets, and git dust fer it."

"And you will kill him?" asked the detective, in a whisper.

"Pal, git yer carriage and you do ther drivin', fer ther corpse is ready."

The detective started, but said:

"What do you mean?"

"When I found he had no boodle, I jist put him ter sleep with that!" and he held up the flask.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE TRAITOR FERRET.

That the detective was deeply moved by the cool confession of Rip, of how he had "put the prisoner to sleep," his actions proved, for he made no reply and walked up and down an instant as though in deep thought.

"Don't git scart, pal, for it hain't nothin' ter help a man out o' life."

"Besides, I did it, so you go and git ther vehicle, fer we hain't no time ter lose, as that New York Nat may come back any time and he be a dandy, he be."

"What will you do?"

"I'll go back and git ther bracelets off of him and tote him down to ther door."

"Then we kin git on each side of him and take him to the carriage, and drive to where our boat is."

"We kin git him inter it, and I'll take him fer a boat ride on the river, while you takes the carriage back to ther stable."

"When you comes ter join me, we'll give him the bath, so as ter make him look drowned, put ther bracelets on him ag'in, and row him down as near ther Headquarters as we kin and you send fer ther patrol waggin ter take his remains up to ther chief, and we kin tell how you got on his trail, I helpin' yer, and he jumped overboard from ther boat and drowned, but we got his valuable remains."

"Then I kin sell out ther gang o' Unknowns fur what ther chief will give me, and we has done a fairly good night's work—see?"

"Yes, I do see, and I also see that you are about the hardest nut I ever saw, Rip."

"I consider that a compliment."

The detective muttered something to himself and then said:

"Are you sure you gave him enough to kill him?"

"Yes, ter kill half a dozen, for he took two swigs at ther flask, and one was enough."

"Go back and get all ready, then, while I go after a carriage."

"Drive yourself, mind, for we don't want no questions axed, or long division in ther reward."

"I will see to that," and the detective walked rapidly away, while the young traitor returned to the retreat of New York Nat and entered as before.

But the defective did not go far before he turned around and started back for the house.

He did not ascend the steps, but went in by the basement door, having keys that admitted him.

He had hardly entered before several muffled forms came along and turned into the basement door, being promptly admitted by the detective.

"He has gone up-stairs," whispered the detective, and he led the way through the dark rooms with the aid of a dark lantern.

Going to the first floor they heard Guard coming down-stairs, but as he approached the detective seized him by the collar and led him to the cellar, locking the door upon him.

The party had removed their shoes, and now moved slowly and noiselessly up-stairs.

The halls were dimly lighted, only from the first floor and fourth, where there was a single gas jet burning.

They seemed to constantly expect to meet some one coming down, but reached the top floor without doing so.

They heard a rattle of chains in the prison room, and the impatiently uttered words:

"I must find a key ter fit these irons, or I can't git him away."

"There is no need of removing the body, Rip. I will attend to that!"

Rip uttered a cry of terror and sprang to his feet, but sank back upon the cot again as the light of three bull's eye lanterns blazed into his eyes and he saw his detective ally with a revolver leveled at him.

"Yer is a cop, was playin' me and has got me dead, but I'll turn State's evidence and let yer enter a big thing," cried Rip, nervously.

"No need of it, Rip, for we are on to the big thing, which is to betray your comrades."

"See here, without my eye-glasses, this rough and tumble rig, and the red paint taken from my face, the plumpers out of my cheeks to make me look fat, and the stain off of my white teeth, you'll find that I am New York Nat, for the time being Detective Cobb, to entrap you."

"I grew suspicious of you, Rip, and set Keno and several others to shadow you. They felt I was right, for you were hanging about the police and detective quarters trying to get up courage to betray us. I then took a hand in the game as Detective Cobb, and trapped you."

"I little dreamed you intended to kill that man, but you did so the moment you found you could not bleed him for money. You were determined that he should not betray us, for that was your pleasing duty. Now, Rip, you have gotten us into a fix with that dead body in the house, but I will carry out the plan of getting rid of it as you intended, by the carriage and the boat."

"As for you, I have the key of those irons, and will unlock them, and you are to wear them, but first, Keno, go down and release Guard, that he may understand that Rip is the prisoner he is to watch now, and he will do it."

Keno went after the dog, while the young traitor sat like one dazed at his discovery, for he did not utter a word.

Keno soon returned with the dog, and New York Nat said:

"Here, Guard, watch this fellow!"

Guard growled and kept his eye upon Rip, while Nat unlocked the manacles from the ankles of the corpse and placed them upon the traitor Ferret.

"See, Guard, he is the one to watch—see?"

Again Guard growled and seemed to understand the situation perfectly, for he lay down by the side of the iron cot.

"Now, Keno, you must get a carriage and play driver, while you, Doc, remain here to help me, and Foxey, you must go at once to see our ally, Mr. Sherman Canfield, and ask him to go to the chief of the Secret Service, get a patrol wagon, and go to the foot of West Seventy— street.

"We will bring the boat in there, and when we see the patrol wagon coming will put the body ashore and row away."

"Yes, sir," said Foxey.

"And should Mr. Canfield not be at home, though I think he will be, as I telegraphed him I would be there to see him, simply go into the district messenger office, write a note to the chief, telling him to send to where the boat is, and

have Teazer take it to him, for he is on duty there to-night."

Keno and Foxey at once departed on their errands, while Doc remained to aid New York Nat get the body of the convict down to the lower floor to await the coming of the carriage.

CHAPTER XV.

THE ALLY.

In a handsome residence upon one of the cross streets of New York, not very far from Herald Square, a young man was seated, enjoying his after-dinner cigar, when a servant entered and informed him that there was a youth who wished to see him.

"Show him in, Bottles," he said, and then murmured:

"New York Nat in some disguise, or one of my young Ferret pards."

He was a handsome man, with a strong face, yet one who saw him in New York would never suspect that he had won a name as a border boy of daring and skill, had followed many a dangerous trail, and been in many a deadly encounter with redskins.

His name was Sherman Canfield, and, detained in New York for some time on business, he had met New York Nat, and owed him his life, the man and the boy thus becoming sworn friends, that ended in an alliance between them in which all dealings of the Unknown Ferrets with the chief of the Secret Service were transacted through Mr. Canfield, thus keeping the youthful detectives still a mystery.

It was Foxey who entered the handsome library where Sherman Canfield sat, for New York Nat had been given a passkey to the house, and went and came at any time.

Several of the band of Ferrets were known to Mr. Canfield, the fair young Girl Queen, Keno, Doc and Foxey being the ones, so that at a glance the messenger was recognized.

"Ah, Foxey, you are my visitor, are you?"

"I expected New York Nat, as he said he would come on an important matter this evening."

"It's a trifle more important, Mr. Canfield, than Cap'n Nat expected, so he was detained, and sent me," answered Foxey, and he delivered the message New York Nat had sent.

"I will go at once to see the chief, and will accompany the patrol wagon to the spot you mention."

"But am I to make no other report?"

"That is all, sir, for Cap'n Nat will see you upon your return home and explain."

"All right; and the body to be delivered, you tell me, is that of the escaped convict known as Fatal Fred?"

"Yes, sir."

"The chief will be glad to get Fatal Fred, dead or alive."

"Now, I'll be off."

Foxy left the house with Sherman Canfield, and the two parted at Broadway, where the latter took a hack for the headquarters of the Secret Service chief, the latter making his way to the rendezvous on the river, to see if New York Nat had arrived.

Reaching headquarters, Sherman Canfield was recognized by the officer in charge, and at once admitted to the chief's private office.

"Ah, Mr. Canfield, glad to see you, and of course you bring me some more good news of work done by my unknown allies," said the chief, pleasantly.

"If you would like to capture the escaped convict, sir, known as Fatal Fred, I can tell you about him."

"By great Caesar's ghost! this is indeed good news, for I have had my men

out constantly on the search, and without results, in spite of the very liberal rewards offered for him, dead or alive."

"Well, you are to get him dead, chief."

"Ah, he has been killed, then?"

"I can tell you nothing more, sir, than if you send a patrol wagon to this place"—and Sherman Canfield handed a slip of paper on which was an address—"you will find there the body of Fatal Fred."

"Is there any one there to tell me more?"

"Not to-night, sir; but to-morrow I will call and give you full information, as that is as much as your Unknown Ferrets deem it necessary for you to know."

"All right. I shall be glad to know all that I can, but if I don't find out who those Unknown Ferrets are, I shall be a candidate for the asylum," said the chief, with a laugh.

Then he added:

"I will take a carriage and go myself. Will you accompany me?"

"I have a carriage at the door, and will go with you."

"Then I will order a patrol wagon from an up-town station. Come on!"

They entered the carriage and drove rapidly away.

Before turning toward the river the chief stopped in an up-town hotel and wired to a station to send a patrol wagon to the spot indicated, and then drove on.

He was anxious to reach the spot before the patrol did.

But Foxey had already arrived at the lonely place, and which was dark and deserted, and had seen a boat coming slowly toward where he stood.

"Cap'n!"

"Ay, ay, Foxey."

"I told him, sir, and the patrol will soon be here."

"Then help us out with the body, and we'll be off."

This was done, the body being laid out decently on the ground, the hands folded upon the breast, and a blanket spread over it.

"Now come into the boat, Foxey, and we'll row out upon the river to watch for the patrol wagon," said Nat.

Foxy was soon in the boat, which rowed off shore a hundred feet and waited.

CHAPTER XVI.

INTERVIEW WITH THE CHIEF.

The carriage dashed up to the rendezvous and halted, the chief and Sherman Canfield springing out and dismissing the hackman, who drove away, most curious to know what the two gentlemen could want at that lonely place at night.

A short search by the chief revealed the blanket-covered body, and his ear detected the sound of oars out upon the river.

"There are your friends, Canfield."

"They waited until they saw us arrive, and are now off for their haunt, wherever it is."

"I'd give a cool thousand to catch them."

"You might kill the goose that lays the golden egg, chief, for if you found out who your unknown allies are, you would fail to discover many crimes they discover for you, and perhaps could not employ them in your service," said Sherman Canfield.

"That is true. But this body is worth nine thousand dollars to them, if it is that of Fatal Fred—another handsome sum to be added to the large amount of rewards I hold for them."

"Yes, sir; and they deserve all they have made."

"Every dollar of it; I'll not deny that."

"But you will surely be in to-morrow

and clear up the mystery of the killing of this man?"

"Yes, sir; I'll come with all the information I can get for you."

"I will have to report the affair to-morrow, and those curious young newspaper men will wish to know the whole story."

"Yes, sir; but here comes the patrol."

"Now we will know if this is really the body of Fatal Fred."

"The Unknown makes few mistakes, sir."

"True; but nine thousand dollars reward is enough to tempt some people to kill a man and dress him up to represent the convict, though, of course, I do not make that charge against your men, as their information sent me has always been thorough and truthful."

The patrol wagon now drew up, half a dozen police, led by a sergeant, sprang out, and, recognizing the chief, saluted.

"Sergeant, there is a body there to be taken to headquarters."

"See if any of your men recognize the man."

The sergeant walked over to the body, the men following, and, throwing back the blanket, flashed a bull's-eye lantern in the face.

"Why, it's—"

"Sh! Do not call the name if you know him, but let each man see if he recognizes the body, and come here to me and say who he is."

The men all looked at the body closely. Two of them beside the sergeant said they knew him, and approaching the chief the sergeant said:

"It is the escaped convict, sir, Fatal Fred."

One of the men came up and said:

"It's the man who escaped, sir, Fatal Fred."

The other man remarked in a whisper, as had the others:

"I'm pretty sure it's the man everybody is looking for, sir, Fatal Fred, the escaped convict."

"All right. Remove the body, sergeant."

"Mr. Canfield, I guess your men have won the prize; but ride up in the wagon as far as Broadway."

This they did, and leaving the patrol wagon, Sherman Canfield dropped into a theater, bought an orchestra seat, went in, remained a short while, and, coming out, took a cab and drove rapidly home.

He was fearful that the chief might dog him to see if he had any visitor at home awaiting him, and thus be able to shadow New York Nat.

When he entered his library, Sherman Canfield found New York Nat, disguised as the "professor," awaiting him.

"Ah, Nat, you are ahead of me, I see?"

"Yes, sir; I landed a few blocks above, after the carriage arrived, and came here."

"Some one was in the carriage with you, sir?"

"Yes; the chief. Now, tell me, Nat, how did you manage to catch that escaped convict?"

New York Nat told his story, from beginning to end, and how Rip had turned traitor and been entrapped.

"I could only send to you, sir, to help us out, as we had the body on our hands, you know."

"Yes; but what am I to tell the chief to-morrow?"

"Tell him, sir, that Fatal Fred was cornered by the Unknowns, and while a prisoner, waiting to be delivered up, he took poison, thus ending his own life."

"That is the truth, and a plausible story, for he would expect no mercy, and preferred to die by his own hand than to be hanged."

"I'll state that when you found what

he had done, you delivered him over as best you could."

"Yes; that is a plain story, and the public need only know that Fatal Fred, entrapped by the chief's detectives, took his own life."

"Yes, sir; and you know how I appreciate your kindness in the matter. But this being settled, I will now tell you what I intended to call and see you about to-night." And New York Nat told his ally the story of Trent Trevor's hanging and all that he had discovered, and that he firmly believed in the innocence of the man, adding:

"Now, Mr. Canfield, of course there is in the 'Book of Crimes' a history of the case, but I would like for you to find out from the chief all that he can tell you about the affair."

"I will, Nat, to-morrow."

"Thank you, sir; and I have put the whole band of the Unknown on the case, so I hope to make some discovery soon."

"I hope so. But what about your prisoner?"

"Rip?"

"Yes."

"Well, sir, we've got him upon our hands, and have got to keep him until we can get rid of him in some way—just how, I do not now know."

"We will think of a plan."

"All right, sir." And Nat took his leave, and hastened back to his retreat, for he felt a little anxious regarding his traitor prisoner.

As he entered the door, voices up-stairs told him that there was some one there.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE TRAITOR PRISONER.

Whether Rip's premonition of evil to himself some day caused him to be particularly friendly with Guard or not I do not know, but he had always played with the dog when he went to the retreat, had seldom forgotten to take him some little luxury in the way of canine edibles, and had thus made himself "solid" with him.

When he had been caught so cleverly by New York Nat in his act of treachery toward the band, Rip was positively squelched.

He acted as though dazed by the blow. It was not that he had been found out in the murder of Fatal Fred—for that did not disturb him in the slightest degree—but he realized that he had broken faith with his comrades, and he did not know what might be the consequences to himself.

Just in the moment of his supposed success he had seen a small fortune fade from his grasp.

It was true that he would have, as a share of the "Reward Fund," when divided, some two thousand dollars; but, tricky himself, he could not believe that New York Nat would keep faith with him, but expected him to bolt with the entire amount.

So he had planned to make a large haul for himself and skip.

But he had not been half so clever as was the Ferret Captain, so had added murder to his crime of treachery and had gotten himself in irons and a prisoner, with chances of some dire fate, as he regarded it, being the result.

As he had shown what he would do, he did not have a doubt that the band would decide to kill him, and he already felt that he would have a stone tied around his neck and be dropped in the river like a cat to drown.

As this thought grew upon him he began to rally from the shock of being caught.

A cold sweat broke out upon him, he tossed restlessly upon the cot, and suddenly he turned his eyes upon Guard, who was lying upon the floor watching him.

The Girl Mascot's Best Score.

Then Rip bethought him of something. It was of escape.

He recalled that he had put a tempting morsel in his pocket for Guard, in case he should have any trouble getting out with Fatal Fred.

He felt for it and took it out.

But Guard growled as he moved.

So Rip began to play the indifferent.

He began to sing, and he had a good voice.

Guard seemed to like it, at least.

Then Rip raised one foot after the other, pulled off his shoes, and slipped those irons off with only a little trouble, for the boy had remarkably small hands and feet.

Then he replaced his socks and shoes, and began to whistle.

Suddenly he called out:

"Here, Guard, catch!"

Guard did catch, and he was pleased with the bun, and was thus tempted.

Rip sat up and Guard caught another mouthful.

Then Rip walked across to the table.

Guard was surprised.

He thought that he was ironed.

He felt that he had made a mistake, or, at least, excused his neglect of duty in that way, for he could not fully understand the situation.

Guard was given another mouthful, this time eating from Rip's hand.

"Come, Guard," said the youth, carelessly, and the two left the prison room.

But Rip felt that he was an outcast.

He dared not venture to go in person to betray the band, for he would be hanged for murder, he thought.

But he would have his revenge and betray them.

Still, he had no desire to become a fugitive empty-handed.

He would have to leave New York, and all the money he had in his pocket was forty dollars.

He knew that New York Nat kept a strong box in the retreat, with a few hundreds in ready funds, perhaps more.

It must be in Nat's own room.

So there he went, and a search revealed the box, hidden away in the furnace register.

A key on Rip's bunch opened the box, and the youth was delighted with his find.

He was so pleased that he stopped to count it.

Guard was watching him and trying to convince himself that it was all right.

"Seven hundred and sixty dollars here, and with the forty I have will give me eight hundred."

"I guess I'm no poor kid, and I'll travel.

"But I'll write ther chief o' ther Secret Service this very night, and send it by a messenger, telling him ter pull this place, and he'll get his grip on New York Nat, and if he'll hev' his men lay low they'll gobble ther whole band."

"I'm not ther kind ter fool with and do an injury to," and Rip seemed to feel that he was the injured one.

When he entered Nat's room he had closed the door behind him, shutting himself and Guard in.

Now, as he turned to go, tossing the rifled box on the bed, the door suddenly opened, and he gave a cry of terror as he beheld a revolver leveled at him.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"HERE, GUARD, AT HER!"

It seemed a startling surprise to Guard as well as to Rip, to feel that some one had entered the house and now confronted them.

The youth realized his mistake in having closed the door and shut the dog in with him.

Guard was still interested in any other morsels that Rip might have for him and had become neglectful of his duty.

It seemed to fill the dog with pride to feel that never a key went into the door down-stairs that he did not go down to greet the visitor.

But now he was fairly caught and at sight of the intruder his tail drooped and for the first time in his life Guard looked sheepish, and felt as he looked.

And the youth? So confident was he that New York Nat was out for half the night and he had the house to himself for several hours, that he had not busied himself.

There were weapons of different kinds in the house, and he had intended to well arm himself before going by making a choice selection.

In fact, Rip knew that Nat had a very extensive wardrobe, and he meant to fit himself out with clothes, underwear and shoes, picking up what else of value he could find and packing all in a large satchel he saw in the room.

Rip intended to start upon his travels as well prepared as he possibly could.

But there before him stood one whose eyes were upon him with a look he did not like.

"Well, Rip, you are a thief as well as a traitor," were the words he heard.

"I guess I has a share in ther money," he growled.

"You have a share in the common treasury, yes, or did have until you forfeited it by your treachery.

"What you are taking now is money belonging personally to Captain Nat."

"Well, what yer going ter do about it, Girl Mascot?"

Unheeding the question, Olive said:

"I arrived just in time to catch you, and I am glad, for you were a prisoner, but in some way freed yourself of your irons and won the friendship of that dog—Guard, I am ashamed of you—come here, sir!"

The dog started toward her in a skulking way, when Rip called out:

"Here, Guard! Come here, sir!"

Guard half turned, and Olive stamped her foot and cried:

"Do you hear me, sir?

"Lie down there!"

"Don't you do it, Guard."

"Here, good dog."

Guard looked ten years older.

His face was full of misery, and not knowing just what to do, he compromised matters by lying down halfway between the Girl Queen and the youth.

Rip smiled viciously and said, with a sneer:

"Well, I axed yer what yer was going ter do about it?"

"I am going to make you return to your prison room, and give up the money you have taken."

"How yer going ter make me?"

"I stand between you and liberty. If you attempt to pass out, I will kill you."

"Yer hain't got ther nerve."

"Try me!"

But, though he could not read the expression on that masked face of the Girl Queen, Rip did not make the attempt to accept her invitation, but said:

"You don't scare me a little bit."

"Do you intend to obey me?"

"No, I don't."

"Then you do not leave this house alive."

"I has got shootin' irons, too."

"Draw them and try to drive me if you can!"

"If yer don't let me pass I'll knife yer, if yer is a gal!"

"Attempt to draw a knife and I break your arm with a bullet, for you know I am a dead shot, for you have heard it."

"If I gives up ther boodle will you let me go?"

"I will not."

"What does yer say I has got ter do?"

"Hold on! If you go near that gas to turn it out, I will fire."

The youth halted quickly, and again said:

"What must I do?"

"Go to your prison again!"

"Well, step back and let me pass out."

"I will not. You must walk in front of me and I will keep my revolver upon your back."

The youth seemed driven to desperation.

His face grew very ugly in its wickedness, and he said, savagely:

"Yer won't let me go, and, durn yer, yer has got ter take ther consequences. Here, Guard! At her! At her!"

The huge dog sprang to his feet with a vicious growl, and Olive saw her danger and met it bravely.

"Down, Guard!" she cried, sternly, and with a light umbrella she carried she struck the dog a heavy blow, breaking the umbrella to pieces.

The act mastered the dog, and he crouched with a whine at her feet.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE MASCOT QUEEN ON GUARD.

Rip had expected the dog would obey him.

He had intended to call him off after frightening the girl, and then make his break for liberty by putting out the gas and in the darkness making his escape.

But the brave act of Olive in facing the danger by striking the dog disconcerted him completely, and he stood in the half-dazed manner that had overwhelmed him when his treachery was discovered by New York Nat.

"I know now how low, despicable and cruel you can be, so don't drive me to take your life. I have no fear of you now, for I know my power and can make this dog tear you to death if you drive me to it. Here, Guard!"

The dog crouched closer at her feet and whined.

Regaining his composure, Rip called also to the dog.

But Guard turned a deaf ear to him now.

"Guard, come up here!"

The dog obeyed the command of Olive, and she laid her left hand upon his head, still grasping the revolver with her right, and keeping her eyes upon the youth.

"Guard, do you see that bad fellow?"

The dog glanced around at Rip, growled and showed his teeth.

Guard was redeeming himself, and Rip turned deadly pale, for he saw that there was no chance longer for him.

"Now, sir; I'll stand no nonsense from you after your attempt to make this dog spring upon me, and if you do not obey me I'll show you that Guard will obey me. Go back to your prison, I say!"

"I'll go, fer yer has hoodoo'd ther blamed dog, and I don't want ter be eat up, but some time I'll git even, see if I don't."

"Obey me, sir; and no threats!" sternly said Olive, and the youth did so, she following close with Guard by her side.

Back to the prison room went Rip, muttering savage curses, and not even Guard hearing the coming of New York Nat.

"How you got those irons off I do not know, but you will sit on that cot until Captain Nat comes, and then he will see that you do not escape again."

"What'll you do?"

"Stand right here with Guard and watch you!"

The youth looked about him as though meditating some desperate act, but he started as Guard gave a yelp of welcome, and New York Nat stepped across the threshold into the room.

"Oh, Nat!" and with the words Olive sprang toward her brother, while Rip dropped upon the cot once again, dazed by utter despair.

"So he got away, Queen?"

"Yes, he had freed himself in some way of his irons, and was robbing you in your room when I found him."

"Where was Guard?"

"He had made friends with him and was also in the room, the door of which was closed."

"How did you get those irons off, Rip?" and New York Nat stepped forward and saw that they were neither broken nor unlocked.

Rip made no reply.

Then Nat drew off the shoes, several sizes too large for him, and he saw how small the feet were.

"Ah, I see. Queen, go to the strong-box in the lodge room and bring me a pair of steel wristlets, large size, and with an eighteen-inch chain between."

Olive obeyed, and these were clasped upon the Traitor Ferret, fitting him snugly, and he was again securely chained to the iron cot.

Then New York Nat asked:

"Did he threaten you, Queen?"

"Yes, to knife me, and he tried to set Guard upon me—for an instant I expected I'd have to shoot—the dog and Rip, too."

Guard hung his head as New York Nat turned upon him.

But the face of the Ferret captain was white, now, and, catching the dog by his collar he took his cane, a wiry one, and punished the dog.

"Now lie there, sir! There!" and Nat pointed to the feet of Olive.

Guard went to the designated spot with a rush.

He knew that he had been led astray by Rip, that he had been tempted by a few mouthfuls of food, and he had received his punishment.

New York Nat was his master and he knew it.

With humble looks he glanced at Nat and Olive, and then gave Rip a look that plainly said:

"I'd like to eat you up!"

"Now, Rip, you are to remain a prisoner here until we decide what shall be done with you. Guard shall still remain on watch, but I will see that one of the band is on duty here all the time, so escape is impossible. The convict whom you killed is in the chief's headquarters, and you see the Ferrets are still unknown."

"Now, Queen, we will leave him," and, leaving the repentant Guard on duty as sentinel, and taking the money which Rip had pocketed, New York Nat went with Olive to his own room and asked:

"Now, sis, what lucky thought brought you here to-night to prevent that traitor's escape?"

"It was to tell you something, Nat, that I remember to have heard the convict say, and which I had forgotten."

"But did I understand aright when you said to Rip that he had killed the convict?"

"Yes, sis, he did, to-night."

"I know that you told me this morning that you knew Rip was a traitor, and would have him trapped and in irons by noon, so when I saw him to-night slip from the prison room with Guard, and enter your room, and heard him taking out the register, I felt that he had escaped and was robbing you, intending to get away."

"Then I acted, and oh! What an ordeal I passed through with him."

"When I saw that the convict was gone I did not understand it, but would not let him think so, and I determined to watch him until you came."

"Need I tell you how glad I was when you appeared?"

"You are a brave girl, sis, and I am sorry you had such an ordeal to face, but you saved us from being betrayed, and that will repay you."

"Now I will tell you how we trapped Rip, and how it was he killed Fatal Fred."

And Nat told the whole story, which Olive listened to with deepest attention.

CHAPTER XX.

THE BOOK OF MYSTERY.

So careful was New York Nat not to allow his sister's identity to be known, that he never spoke of her to any of the Ferrets by her name, nor did they know that she was his sister.

Thus, even in the excitement of the moment with the traitor Rip, he had not let a word slip to show that she was other to him than the Girl Queen of the Unknown Ferrets.

When they reached Nat's room, and Olive had heard the story of how Rip had been trapped, she felt much pleased that her pluck and determination had prevented him from escaping to make known the secret they had striven so hard to keep.

"Now, sis, you have something to tell me, and which, fortunately, brought you here to-night," said Nat.

"Brother, I fear it will do no good now."

"And why not now?"

"Because it was about the convict."

"And his death makes it useless?"

"Well, it was just this: When he came to me in the grove that day, he made a remark that struck me as strange at the time, but which I afterward recalled when you told me of going to see Mr. Trent Trevor."

"Well?"

"He said, I think, that he felt blue, as he had an old friend who was hanged the day before."

"Indeed?"

"Yes, Nat, and that he had hoped to escape from prison in time to see him hanged, but he had not been able to do so, and had not the price of a ticket out to the town where the hanging took place."

"This is strange, for there was certainly no one else hanged anywhere in the country that I know of about that time."

"No. And let me tell you, Nat, in recalling this remark, it brought back to me the memory of that night when Pawnbroker Blenheim was killed, and, like a flash, the face of one of the men came back to me, and the convict, Fatal Fred, was the one I then saw."

"Can it be possible?"

"Yes, Nat; for I now recall his face and form perfectly, and he was the man. But it is too late now, he is dead; but I hoped that through him something might be found out in the search for the guilty ones, and so I started over here at once to see you."

"Well, sis, it turned out all right as it is; but let me tell you that I found on the body of the convict this little memorandum-book."

"It is old, as you see, has been worn by long use and carrying, and he must have had it in prison with him, though how he managed to hide it from the officials I cannot understand."

"I merely glanced at it, but we will look it over now, and see what secret it may tell, for the book was kept for a purpose, I am sure."

New York Nat held in his hand the little memorandum.

It was a couple of inches long by one in width, and many of the leaves were missing.

But the writing was read without difficulty.

"Here is his name, I suppose, though what it really was they were unable to find out at his trial."

"This is 'Hart Chester,' and I say it was his, as you see following is alias Fatal Fred, and below is the name of his native place, doubtless, 'Portsmouth,' but whether in this country or in England it does not say."

"Here are the addresses of some of New York's rich people, evidently put down as places to rob, and then come a score of country banks, and several jewelry stores, and—here is

"Blenheim—Pawnbroker!"

This discovery surprised both Nat and Olive, and continuing to glance over the book, the Ferret Captain said:

"You see, sis, that some of the names are scratched off, with the letter R after them."

"R may stand for raided, but I will get Mr. Canfield to take these addresses to-morrow and see if the houses and banks mentioned were ever robbed."

"Ah! See here!"

Olive leant over and looked where Nat's finger rested.

"It is the name of Trent Trevor," she said, in a whisper.

"It is, and was written some time ago, while the words following have been erased, but you see freshly written here is the letter D and the date."

"The very date Mr. Trevor was hanged on."

"Yes."

"This is conclusive proof that it was he to whom he referred when he said he had a friend hanged that day."

"No doubt of it now; but what can they have held in common, those two men?"

"I do not yet know, but shall some day."

"But that he knew Mr. Trevor is certain, and that he was connected with the Blenheim murder is also certain, while our friend's being accused, first of the murder, and then having it said that he was innocent, but knew who the guilty one was, shows to me that the two were in some way connected."

"I fear so; but I still stand firm in my belief that Trent Trevor was innocent of all crime."

"So do I, sis."

"But here is a name and address I must investigate. You see, it was written long ago in the book, and scratched out, but here it is written again, and lately."

"Yes—Douglas Delafield," and Olive read the name aloud, while Nat continued, reading from the book:

"Douglas Delafield. Office, No. — Worth street, New York City; residence, No. — One Hundred and Fifty —th street, Washington Heights."

"Olive, I will find out who he is tomorrow."

"There is something on the other page, Nat."

Turning over the page, Nat read:

"Oakvale Hall, Ramapo Valley. June to September."

"This must go with the name of Delafield, and was put down for some purpose of gain."

"We will see who he is, and what connection he can have had with Fatal Fred; but come, it is after midnight, and I must see you home," and New York Nat escorted Olive to her cottage home, returning to the retreat very tired, after his hard day and night's work, to find Guard trying hard to redeem himself by good behavior, for he was diligently keeping guard over the prisoner.

CHAPTER XXI.

NAT MAKES SOME DISCOVERIES.

It was the afternoon of the third day after the trapping of Rip, the Traitor Ferret, that New York Nat went up to the cottage to see his sister, and the two walked out into the grove on the Hudson, where they always were wont to go when they had anything of an important nature to communicate to each other.

"Well, Nat, if you had not come this afternoon, I was going to see what had happened," said Olive.

"I have been very busy, sis."

"You must tell me all you have done."

"But is Rip safe?"

"Indeed he is."

"And Guard?"

"Is the best dog I ever saw. Why, he seems fairly to hate his prisoner now."

"You have seen Mr. Canfield?"

"Oh, yes; and the rewards for the convict's body, dead or alive, foot up to nine thousand dollars, and the Secret Service chief has placed them to the credit of his unknown allies."

"We are getting rich, Nat, and glad will I be when we no longer have to lead the lives we do as shadowers."

"So will I, sister."

"Well, did you find out about the addresses in the convict's book?"

"Yes; Mr. Canfield found out for me."

"Well?"

"The names scratched out were those of houses that had been robbed by Fatal Fred and his pals before they were tried."

"The banks, I suppose, had shared the same fate?"

"Yes; they were all small country banks, and had been robbed."

"Now about that Mr. Douglas Delafield?"

"I'll tell you, sis. He is a very rich man, and his place of business is No. — Worth street, though he does not seem to have much other business than in collecting his rents. His residence is the number given in the memorandum, and Oakvale Hall, Ramapo Valley, is a fancy farm he owns out of the city."

"Do you know anything about him?"

"Only that he used to be a fast man about town, with little money, but married a very rich heiress by the name of Marigold."

"Anything else?"

"Well, I had set Mr. Delafield down as one of the convict's intended victims to rob, until I read the notes Mr. Canfield had secured for me of this man Fatal Fred's record."

"Then you found out more about him, Nat?"

"Yes. I discovered that Mr. Delafield had been his benefactor, had paid a prominent lawyer to defend him, had tried hard to get him bailed out, but was unsuccessful."

"But now to the Blenheim murder, for Mr. Canfield got me the full record of it."

"I would like to hear it."

Blenheim was a very rich Jew, and, by a strange coincidence, a friend of this same Delafield, whose home he often visited.

He lived alone in the little three-story building where his shop was, and had the name of being very rich, and keeping several safes full of valuable jewelry, gems and money.

"His murderers entered the store by some means, without breaking in, and they aroused him in robbing his safes.

"He fired on them, for there were two, and his dying words were that he had wounded one, who, he asserted in his confession, with his last breath, was Trent Trevor, whom he knew well."

"Of course Trent Trevor was arrested, but there were scores to prove an alibi

for him, as he had intended going on a hunting trip that day, but had given it up and attended an entertainment in the country, arriving early and remaining all night.

"But, though innocent, he escaped from jail, and the keeper was killed by him, it was said—at least, he was hanged for the crime.

"Now, the man that Blenheim's dying confession asserted was Trevor, was supposed to be a younger brother, who had left home several years before, under a cloud, and who was never heard of again, and it was he whom Blenheim had wounded, or said he had, though who his accomplice was was never known."

"But we now know, Nat, that it was Fatal Fred."

"Beyond a doubt, sis."

"There followed a description of Trevor's brother, whose name was Tracey Trevor.

"The description was thorough, and stated that he had a bullet-wound on the left side of his head, the collar bone broken on the right side, two broken ribs on the same side, the little finger of his left hand missing, his left arm broken between the shoulder and elbow, and his second toe on the right foot gone.

"It seems that he had been in half a dozen shooting and cutting scrapes, and had been very badly used up, and the police got their identifying marks from the surgeons in the hospitals where he had been taken when injured."

"But they never found him?"

"No; but I made a discovery, sis, I consider important."

"What is it, Nat?"

"That memorandum of the convict has considerable written in it with invisible ink!"

"Can you make it out?" eagerly asked Olive.

"Every word of it," came the earnest reply, and the words followed:

"And if I am not very much mistaken, it will hang some one."

CHAPTER XXII.

THE CONVICT'S BOOK.

New York Nat took the dead convict's memorandum book from his pocket, where he had it carefully wrapped up and put away, and, opening it, said:

"You see, there are some of the pages written ~~in~~, some are not, Olive."

"Yes."

"Now, here is a page that apparently had no writing upon it, but Mr. Canfield was looking over the book, and something caught his eye which caused him to get a very powerful microscope.

"With this he saw that lines had been traced on the pages. But he could not make them out, so sent to the druggist's and procured an acid. This we put on the page you see here with a sponge, and it brought the writing out quite plain.

"As Mr. Canfield had a telegram to meet Buffalo Bill at the station, he left me to go on with the work of deciphering the writing in the memorandum.

"I brought out two of the three pages thus written over with invisible ink, and just hear how they read. Then we will fetch out the other page, for I have the acid and sponge with me."

He took the little book and held it up so that he could see the faintly-traced lines, and read:

"Blenheim; K, March 17th.

"Proceeds worth \$40,000, taken by D. D. Oakvale, to divide between T. T. and me."

"B. put T. T. to sleep with lead pipe, and D. D. took him to Oakvale, where he died, and was buried recently with B.'s boodle."

"That made me heir to all boodle, but got nipped two days for another 'count and served two years."

"Got out, but D. D. in Europe, so wrote him."

"Six months before letter came, saying he was coming home soon."

"Came in six months, day I was nipped again."

"Now, Olive, we'll see what the other page says."

"These say enough to work upon easily, Nat."

"Yes, indeed." And New York Nat saturated a little sponge he carried in a tin box with some acid, and rubbed it several times gently over the page of the memorandum on which the invisible writing was.

In a little while faint lines began to appear, and after a few minutes, with several more applications of the sponge, the writing was distinctly seen.

"Now," said Nat, and he read aloud as before:

"Tried to save me, but couldn't."

"Got life sentence."

"I bribed guard to let me have this book and few extras in cell, so don't suffer much."

"D. D. swears to get me out some day, and will give me B.'s boodle when I'm free."

"I jot down these notes so I won't forget, and D. D. must not, for if boodle don't materialize, T. T.'s body will, and both are buried together, in stable D. D. told me."

"Wonder if he is lying, or intends to play me false."

"If so, he hangs, if I have to hang with him, for T. T. and I acted for him, and D. D. killed the —, for he dared not let his victim be tried."

"Now, sis, you have it all, so what do you think?"

"In the first place, if Fatal Fred wrote this, he was not the ignorant man he professed to be."

"No, he was playing a part, for he wrote it, and see, the writing is the same as the other in real ink."

"He, in some way, smuggled these things into prison with him, and to make no mistake, as a man is often said to lose his memory in confinement, he wrote these tell-tale lines in this book."

"Whom do you make T. T., Nat?"

"Why, Tracey Trevor, before spoken of in the record of Blenheim's murder."

"And this says that he was killed by Blenheim?"

"Yes; you remember Blenheim said he fired on the robbers, and wounded one; you told me you heard the shot as you were passing that night."

"I did."

"Well, I make out that Tracey Trevor and Fatal Fred got away with their plunder, though the former was wounded, and had all arranged to go to Oakvale."

"T. re Trevor died of his wound, Fatal Fred kept dark until the affair blew over, but was arrested on another charge and put in prison, leaving the plunder at Oakvale until he could get out."

"Oakvale is the country home of Mr. Douglas Delafield."

"Yes; and D. D. is Douglas Delafield."

"But what motive had he for such murderous work, and robbery, as you said he was a gentleman of wealth and refinement?"

"He is all that, apparently, but his motive we must find out."

"Well, it is a most mysterious case, but I am sure you can unravel it, Nat."

"I hope so, for I must keep my pledge to Trent Trevor, who now I feel was the victim of a most cruel plot."

"Which his brother aided, it seems."

"Perhaps not intentionally."

"He, Tracey Trevor, seems to have been the greatest sufferer, for he lost his life."

"Yes, and from the wounds you describe him as having received, he seemed to always get hit if a gun went off anywhere in his neighborhood."

Nat laughed, and replied:

"Well, with the scars he received, as described in the police record, his body certainly can be identified."

"Without doubt; but what will be your first move, Nat?"

"I shall go out to R— and learn all I can of Trent Trevor's history, while I also wish to see the little monument I ordered placed over his grave."

"And I would like to go with you."

"Certainly; and from there I will go and make a call upon Oakvale, and see what I can find out there, for there I feel the mystery is to be unearthed, and Douglas Delafield, I found out, is now at his country house."

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE UNKNOWN MOURNER.

Toward the pretty little cemetery of R— New York Nat and Olive wended their way, after being set down at the junction, a mile away, one morning two days after the reading of the convict's invisible writing.

The day before they had gone to see Mr. Sherman Canfield by appointment, and there had the honor of meeting the renowned scout of whom they had heard and read so much.

Buffalo Bill was the hero of every boy in the Unknown Ferret League, and when their captain had told them at the meeting the night before he was to meet the great plainsman, each one envied him the honor.

Sherman Canfield introduced his young allies as two particular friends of his, and Buffalo Bill greeted them in the kindly, cordial manner natural to him, and they were charmed.

It was the next day they started for R—, Keno being left in charge of the retreat, though Guard seemed most anxious to atone for his past act of unfaithfulness, and kept near the prisoner.

But then both Rip and Guard would have to be fed, if New York Nat was delayed, so Keno remained in charge.

Arriving at the junction, Nat found the same Irish watchman there who had told him of Trevor's hanging, and he was greeted like an old and dear friend.

The Irishman had not forgotten the liberal fee Nat had given him, and he soon had a light phaeton for them to drive about in, the driver being a boy.

Finding that he would have but a couple of hours before time to catch a train out to Oakvale, Nat drove first to the stonecutter's, and found that the monument had been erected on time, and learned that there was an "unknown and veiled lady" that visited the grave several times, always placing beautiful flowers upon it.

With this information Nat drove to the jail and renewed his acquaintance with the keeper.

Asking for all the information he could get regarding the past life of Trent Trevor, the jailer went to his jail record and, finding the page he wished, said:

"Mr. Trevor was not a native of this place, for he was born in New York, but came out here to live, while doing business in the city."

"He had a little cottage, rented, and neatly furnished, for he was not a rich man, though he had a fair income."

"It was said that he and his brother had been left well off, but Tracy Trevor ran through with his fortune, and Trent Trevor spent his in paying his fast brother's debts and keeping him out of prison."

"It was said that Trent Trevor was to marry a very beautiful New York girl, and an heiress to a large fortune, but this Blenheim affair came, and then his killing the keeper and escaping, so, of course, she went back on him."

"Who was she, sir?"

"I believe her name was Kate Wynchurst."

"Has she since married?"

"Yes, she married a rich man in the city by the name of Delafield, I have heard."

When Nat had gotten all the information he could glean from the jailer, he went out and got into the phaeton, where Olive was awaiting him.

"To the cemetery," he said to the boy, and they were rapidly driven there.

Leaving the phaeton at the gate the brother and sister entered, and, after a short walk, neared the grave of the man who had died on the gallows.

"There is a lady there, if it is the 'ave apart from the others," said Olive.

"So there is!"

"We will remain about here."

They saw a slender form, robed in black and wearing a heavy vail, bending over the grave and placing flowers upon it.

In a short while she arose and left the spot, Nat and his sister strolling along so as to meet her, and having apparently visited the cemetery with no special aim in view.

As they passed her they could not but note her elegant black silk dress and handsome bonnet, while the heavy vail seemed to be brought along for the particular purpose of hiding her face, though, not seeing others near, she had removed it as she left the grave.

"What a beautiful face!" said Nat, as she passed on.

"How exquisitely she is dressed," Olive said.

"A lovely, sad face, and a splendid figure."

"She had been weeping."

"Yes, who can she be, Nat?"

"I am going to find out, for she has walked to the cemetery, as there is no carriage awaiting her. We will go to the grave, then overtake her, and, as your train to the city leaves first, I will take you to the junction station and then drive into town to go by the other road to Oakvale."

They reached the grave and found beautiful flowers upon it, placed there by the lady who had just left it.

There were faded flowers scattered about, which had been renewed.

The little monument was all that they could wish, but Nat started as he saw that something had been painted beneath the name, in red lettering.

It was:

"The victim of a legal murder."

"Oh, Nat! Could she have done that?"

"I am sure that she did, Olive, for why does she come to the grave of a man who was hanged?"

"I must know who she is, and, really, I half suspect." —

CHAPTER XXIV.

NAT SHOWS HIS HAND.

Taking from a paper she carried a bouquet of choice flowers, Olive placed them tenderly upon the grave of Trent Trevor.

Then the brother and sister turned away and were soon driving rapidly toward the junction.

On the way they passed the lady they had seen in the cemetery, and she was going to the other depot, not to the junction.

Leaving Olive in the care of the Irish watchman, Nat drove hastily to the other

end of the town and reached there in time for the train he wished to take.

As he had expected, he saw the fair unknown there, and she took the same train, for the boy said that he had twice driven from that depot to the cemetery and back.

Nat took a seat in the same car that she did, and at last, when the station called where he intended to get out, he saw her rise also.

A handsome carriage, with coachman in livery, met her at the station, and she was driven rapidly away.

Nat concluded that he would walk, but asked the station agent how far it was to Oakvale Hall.

"It's five miles, all of it; but if you'd spoke sooner, that was Mrs. Delafield's carriage just drove off."

Nat said that he preferred to walk; his business was not with Mrs. Delafield, and asked if her husband was at home.

"He comes out on the three o'clock train."

"Thank you." And Nat went up in the village, where there was a summer hotel, and had dinner.

Then he set out over a beautiful country road for Oakvale Hall.

It was a beautiful home of a hundred acres, the house large and elegant, and the outbuildings, fencing and grounds all kept in the finest style.

As he neared the gate a buggy passed him, then drew up.

In it was a gentleman of fine appearance, with Burnside whiskers and dressed in the height of fashion.

He was driving a fine horse, and as he drew rein he said:

"I was told at the station that a young man had started to walk out to my house.

"Are you the one?"

Nat wished that the agent had held his tongue, but answered politely:

"I am, sir."

"I am Mr. Delafield."

"And my name is Chandler, sir."

"Were you going to see me?"

"Yes, sir; upon a matter of considerable importance to you."

"Get in and drive with me."

"Thank you," and Nat obeyed.

"Ah, there goes my carriage now, with my wife; but she will be back for dinner," said Mr. Delafield, as he saw the same handsome turnout Nat had seen at the station turn from the gate and drive in the opposite direction.

For some reason Mr. Delafield did not ask New York Nat his business with him until they were seated in the library.

"I always drive in to the station myself, leaving my horse at the stable, for I am short of help just now, having only a coachman, where I generally keep two men," explained Mr. Delafield.

Nat bowed in silence, and he saw that Mr. Delafield was anxious to hear the "important business" that had brought him there, so he said:

"Are we alone, sir?"

"Perfectly."

"What is your business with me?"

"I wished to see you about four dead men, Mr. Delafield—Trent Trevor, Tracey Trevor, Fatal Fred and Blenheim, the pawnbroker."

The reply was so sudden, so startling, that Douglas Delafield uttered a cry and turned white.

"What is there to shock you so, Mr. Delafield?" asked Nat, quietly.

"Why—why, it is enough to startle any one, for I knew poor Trent Trevor well, his brother I did not know, and Blenheim I had business connections with, while the man you speak of as Fatal Fred was my valet at one time; but why do you speak of them, sir?"

"I'll tell you frankly, that I discovered

a few that may prove Trent Trevor guiltless of the murder for which he was hanged, and I wish your help in the matter."

"Certainly, certainly. Poor Trevor! But who are you, sir?"

"I am an amateur detective, sir."

"You see, I am very fond of the work, only I dare not let any of my friends know what I am doing, as they would be down on me."

"So I thought I would ferret out some great case, say nothing to a soul about it, get the whole mystery solved, and then spring it upon the public to show what I could do."

"I see. But how did you get upon this case?"

"I found a note that had been written to some one by the murderer, Fatal Fred, and in it saw written:

"If anything happens to me, see Mr. Douglas Delafield, of Oakvale Hall, and he will help those depending upon me."

"If he refuses, ask him to clear up the mystery about Trent and Tracey Trevor and Blenheim, the pawnbroker."

"You see, the letter must have been thrown down by this Fatal Fred when he was captured, for I found it just where the detectives had caught him, and it was addressed to a man in the Bowery."

"I went to the address, but found that the man had died the day before."

"Then I came to you."

"You did perfectly right, my young friend, and I predict that you will make a name for yourself some day as a detective."

"But is no one in the secret with you?"

"If I gave my secret away, others would get the credit."

"I see. You are right."

"No one, then, knew of your coming here?"

"Not a man, sir."

"Nor of this letter you found?"

"No one ever saw it, sir."

"Where is it?"

"I have it here." And Nat took out a letter he had already prepared himself with, for he had mapped out his plan of action.

"We will go where we can talk this matter over quietly."

"I will join you in a few minutes." And Mr. Delafield left the room.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE TELL-TALE SKELETON.

Nat sprang to the door and listened. He heard Mr. Delafield pass out to the rear of the house.

Following to the dining room, he heard the cook tell him that Mrs. Delafield and her maid had gone for a drive to S—, but would return to a late dinner, and also that the house servant was sick abed.

Then the cook added:

"I didn't know you was home, sir."

In ten minutes the master returned, but from the window Nat had seen him go out to the stable.

"Now we will take a walk. Come this way, so I can show you the grounds."

Nat took notice that he was led by a way through the grounds so that he could not be seen from the mansion by the cook.

He was at once upon his guard, and more so when Mr. Delafield led him into the stables to show him his fine horses.

"That is a thoroughbred. Stand over there where you can get a good view of him, for there is no man about to lead him out."

Mr. Delafield pointed out the exact spot where Nat was to stand.

As the young detective stepped there

he felt the floor beneath him give way, and he nerved himself for a fall!

Down into a dark trap went New York Nat, but he caught sight of the malignant triumph upon Delafield's face as he fell.

Nat had expected a trap of some kind; a quick glance had shown him the well-concealed door in the floor, and he had expected it might be a trap; but, for all that, down he went, and hard, too. He had fallen, however, on his feet, and received only a shock, yet he fell over on his side and lay quiet as though badly hurt.

A moment after, by a small trap door elsewhere, Delafield came down, lantern in hand, descending by a ladder.

He gave only a glance at the young detective, but, running to a corner, seized a rope and drew the trap up into place again, where it caught firmly by a spring.

Then he turned toward New York Nat, a hatchet in his hand, and said, in a savage tone:

"Again I will bury the accursed secret, for no one saw him here. Yes—"

"Hands up, or I will kill you!"

The man staggered backward as though Nat had struck him a hard blow, the hatchet fell from his hands and he seemed about to fall.

Quick as a flash Nat was by his side, grasping his hands, and the click, click! told that a pair of manacles had been snapped upon the man.

Then down upon his knees went Douglas Delafield, and lustily he begged for mercy, offering a small fortune if Nat would spare him.

But the young detective merely said:

"No, sir; I will know the truth, now, and remove the cloud of dishonor from Trent Trevor's grave!"

"Ah! This is a secret den of yours, is it?—why, here is a strong box, and it is heavy with plunder, no doubt—what? A skeleton, too, all neatly wired together!"

"Yes, I remember you were a doctor, so knew your business well. Let me see," and Nat was looking over the skeleton with the aid of the lantern.

"Why, I know this skeleton—a broken arm, smashed ribs, missing little finger, missing toe, and a bullet mark along the side of the head—it is Tracey Trevor's skeleton. Well, well. I must go, now, so come!"

The man could hardly climb the ladder that led up into the stable wall, where there was a secret door.

Nat closed it after them, saw that the trap in the floor was well concealed again, and led the way to the mansion.

As they entered the library the carriage rolled up and Mrs. Delafield got out.

Nat was in a quandary, but made a bold face of it, and, meeting the lady at the door, while her now utterly crushed husband sank into a chair, he said:

"Pardon me, madam, but I am a detective. I have arrested your husband, who, if he can prove his innocence, will be all right."

The beautiful woman turned pale, but said, calmly:

"I will hear the charges you have to make, sir."

She called to her maid that they were not to be disturbed, and, entering the library, closed the door behind her.

"Now, madam, allow me to tell the story in my own way," and then, as Mrs. Delafield bowed assent, New York Nat went on to tell the story as he had made it known to her husband, not in any way committing himself or his Ferrets.

To his surprise and delight Mrs. Delafield was perfectly calm, asking a question here and there, and then saying:

"I thank you, sir, for clearing up a

most remarkable mystery. Mr. Delafield I never loved, but I promised to be his wife if he would free the man from prison whom I did love. He did so, and only of late did I find out that in freeing him he killed the guard. This Trent Trevor did not know until too late.

"At the time Mr. Trevor was hanged for the murder he, Douglas Delafield, had committed, he told the secret in his delirium, and I heard all. More, I know now that Delafield, to crush Mr. Trevor in my eyes, got Tracey Trevor, a brother of Trent's, but a worthless fellow, and a rough from New York, to rob Blenheim, the pawnbroker.

"From his resemblance to his brother, Trent Trevor was to be accused of the crime.

"Wounded by Blenheim, who was killed, as you know, Delafield brought Tracey here, where he died of the wound, and the doctor afterward accounted for the body by saying it had been sent from a hospital in New York for him to arrange.

"Now the whole story comes out, for by his own hand, in a fit of delirium, this man betrayed himself, for he got out of bed before me and wrote what he called his confession of crime. I have it safe, and to-day I received my papers, giving me a full divorce from Douglas Delafield, which I forced him to give me.

"Thus, sir, you know the story of his crimes, and how I have been cruelly wronged, though what are my wrongs compared with poor Trent Trevor's, lying in a dishonored grave, for he would not betray the man who had aided him to escape from prison, which, without thought of the consequences, I urged him to do, and wrong me; he died with sealed lips.

"You will remove Mr. Delafield at once, sir, to prison, I suppose?"

"I wish to prevent publicity for the present, madam, and so will await until dark to take him into the city, with your permission."

"Do as you deem best," was the answer. "Remember, I am not now his wife. All of his own property he has squandered, but mine, by my father's will, he could not touch."

It was just dark when Nat left Oakvale with his prisoner.

CONCLUSION.

It was through Sherman Canfield that New York Nat delivered his prisoner over to the chief of the Secret Service, and was not known in the affair save as the "Unknown Ferret."

The memorandum was given up, also, and as the skeleton in the Oakvale secret chamber was pronounced undoubtedly that of Tracey Trevor, and the booty taken from Blenheim was discovered there intact, there was no doubt of Douglas Delafield's guilt.

The night he was put in prison he asked to be allowed to write a note, and the request was granted.

In the morning it was found to be a confession of his crimes, and of the murder of the jail-keeper in particular, to aid Trent Trevor in his escape.

It was his dying confession, for he had taken a poison he had with him, and so had joined the great majority.

Going out to R—, Nat was given the papers by the jailer, as agreed, and he found in them a will leaving to him twelve thousand dollars in cash, the contents of the two large linen envelopes.

It was New York Nat's legacy.

He had kept his pledge and removed the dishonor from the grave of poor Trent Trevor, a victim indeed of a legal murder.

Still keeping their secret hidden, New

York Nat and his Ferrets continued on in their good work, and though they received a great scare when it was found that Rip had escaped, in spite of all watchfulness, they soon found out that he had not dared betray them on account of the dread of being hanged for the murder of the convict, Fatal Fred.

As for Mrs. Delafield, she still lives at Oakvale, a beautiful recluse, loved by all who know her, and with the only love of her life buried in the grave of Trent Trevor, but over which the shadow of dishonor no longer rests.

Anxious to find out the detective who had run her wicked husband to earth, she had tried hard to do so, but all her efforts were baffled, for though directed by the Secret Service chief to Sherman Canfield, she could learn nothing.

She nevertheless insisted in placing in Mr. Canfield's hands a handsome sum of money as a token of her appreciation of the one who proved Trent Trevor innocent, and the amount was turned over to the Girl Queen, to go into the treasury of the Unknown Ferrets.

THE END.

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